

AURORA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

PROGRESS MONITORING AUDIT

PREPARED FOR:
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MAY 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on Aurora Central High School's (ACHS) fidelity of implementation to its Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) and the 2013 Tiered Intervention Grant application (TIG). The report also summarizes changes that have occurred in the past year in response to instructional audit findings as of May 2014. Conclusions and recommendations to address ACHS challenges are provided.

Aurora Central High School (ACHS) is a comprehensive high school that serves approximately 2,086 students. The school has a history of poor academic performance. Last year, only 34.8% scored proficient or advanced in reading; 11.9% scored proficient or advanced in mathematics; 15.9% scored proficient or advanced in writing; and 14.6% scored proficient or advanced in science. Median growth percentiles were well below expectations, though the school was rated “approaching” in reading, mathematics, and writing, but the school did not meet expectations in English language proficiency growth. The graduation rate was 57.1% using a 7-year calculation. The dropout rate was 9.9% and the mean ACT composite score was 15.1.

To address these concerns, ACHS adopted a transformation model for school change, replacing the principal and many staff, and developed a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) to detail the strategies and activities that would be implemented to change teacher practices to become more effective, address school climate, and accelerate improvement and student achievement. An instructional audit was conducted by RMC Research in 2013 to help diagnose the challenges in the school. The school secured a Tiered Intervention Grant (TIG) to fund necessary changes.

At the request of the district, RMC Research collected data from school administrators, teachers, deans, counselors, classified staff, and students to determine progress made in implementing the strategies contained in the UIP and TIG, and to determine fidelity and impact of the activities conducted. The data were also analyzed to document specific changes in instruction and support for instruction from 2013 to 2014 related to the instructional audit.

FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF FIDELITY TO UIP

Fidelity to the UIP was very high. ACHS has implemented nearly all of the activities that were outlined in the school's UIP. A few were deferred or dropped; other activities were added. Impacts, however, were mixed. The four areas in which activities were categorized and their impacts are:

Curriculum and Instruction. Focused professional development was provided and had positive results that included:

- Increased teacher knowledge and implementation of effective instructional strategies for writing across the content areas;
- Increased teacher understanding and communication of lesson plan objectives;

- Increased teacher knowledge and implementation of strategies related to the Madeline Hunter approach to lesson delivery;
- Increased coaching resulting in more engaging instruction and rigor for some teachers;
- Increased collaboration of teachers in the same department; and
- Establishment of academic goals for every classroom.

Strategies connected with data provision and analysis were not as effective, with too few teachers understanding how to interpret data and too few using results to improve their instruction.

Equity and Engagement. Multiple activities were held in this area, with mixed results. Activities included:

- Improving the physical appearance of the school, creating a new mission and motto, making daily announcements, holding a pep rally, and sponsoring more student clubs and programs that led to improved appearance and better student attachment and pride in the school; and
- Cessation of pep rallies and other spirit-related activities for students, and challenges associated with the “tardy sweeps” (discussed next) which led to suspicion, uneven enforcement of policies and consequences for missing classes, and decreased student attachment and pride in the school.

Communication and Accountability. Many activities were implemented in this domain, again with mixed and sometimes clearly unintentional results.

- Six early warning interventionists (EWIs) were hired to work with failing and at-risk ninth- and tenth-grade students. Students reported that the EWIs were helpful but some questioned whether the cost per student was worth the benefit since so few students were served;
- Counseling was devoted to grade levels; administrators met with at-risk students, after-school and Saturday tutoring was provided, all of which were well-received and helped students with credit accrual and increasing their motivation to learn;
- Round up of displaced students and super seniors, to help them enroll in E2020 and other activities focused on credit accrual and school completion. This activity led to 55 students being graduated midyear with either a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED).
- The tardy sweeps/accountability walks changed the perceived locus of control in the school, from a sense of chaos and student control, to a sense of orderliness and adult control. However, some actions associated with the strategy were perceived as punitive and intended to promote student dropout or absenteeism since the consequences for being late by just a few minutes were so high. A parent complained and the district asked the school to change the policy. A new (similar) strategy (accountability walks) was implemented. The new strategy was not implemented with as much fidelity, and consequences for students were not consistent. The new policy was not as effective in reducing tardiness and was still considered by many of the students and their parents to be overly punitive.

- Communication with parents/guardians about student achievement was increased through school newsletters, an improved website, teacher postcards, and robo-calls to parents of failing students.
- Rewards for positive behaviors included an ice cream social for students whose attendance was above 90%. Some students wished there were more rewards for student achievement.

Campus and Community. Many activities were implemented to connect parents and community partners to the school, which resulted in low but better participation by parents than had been the case in the past. Activities included:

- Parenting matters programs that sponsored educational events; parent coffees and other gatherings; parent classes; parent learning walks where parents observed classrooms and provided feedback; and classes for parents on cooking and English as a second language.
- The website was improved to make it more attractive and accessible, and community breakfasts were held to engage community partners.

FIDELITY TO THE TIG

Fidelity to the TIG was very high. Nearly all of the activities identified in the TIG were implemented as planned. However, as is the case with the UIP, the activities resulted in mixed impacts.

Transformation model. A new, highly experienced principal was hired and established a new mission and vision for school transformation. Three new assistant principals were hired. For the first semester, great momentum was developed and bold initiatives were instituted, in the areas of professional learning, student engagement, graduation rate, and parent involvement, as described above. However, over the course of the year, rifts developed among the assistant principals which caused a slowing of momentum and some instability among staff. Some of the climate issues that arose around questioning motives, transparency, and fear for one's job are typical of the transformation model, especially since some staff were asked to leave based on ineffective performance. Other issues were more unique to the school and its leadership team, and require attention.

Operational flexibility. The principal was given operational flexibility by the district and implemented the flexibility by creating an infrastructure for support and increased time for professional development and after-school programming.

Support from the Local Education Agency (LEA). Ongoing support was provided by the LEA.

Teacher evaluation system. The system was piloted this year but was received with mixed reviews.

Reward school staff who increase achievement and support or remove those who are not effective. Staff were unsure about rewards, but all respondents were clear that those who were ineffective would be supported to improve and, as needed, dismissed.

Recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in a turnaround school. Three administrators and 34 teachers were hired this year. Some will be retained and others will not.

Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based, aligned to state content standards, and vertically aligned. All of the changes to the instructional program made this year were research-based and aligned to state content standards.

Use data to inform and differentiate instruction. ACHS did not provide sufficient access to data nor sufficient instruction to teachers to enable them to analyze data well and use data to differentiate instruction. There is little differentiated instruction in evidence in the school.

Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time. The school provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in after-school and Saturday instruction, but only about 25 to 30 students per day did so. Leadership also emphasized bell-to-bell instruction, with mixed results.

Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement. As summarized previously, many activities were put into place to increase family and community engagement. Participation rates were low but better than in the past.

DIFFERENCES IN INSTRUCTIONAL AUDIT RATINGS: INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES

Classroom observations and information from interviews and focus groups were used to provide a snapshot of differences in instructional practices and support for instructional practices from 2013 to 2014. Changes in ratings of instruction included:

- Increases in posting and referring to lesson objectives/learning goals; somewhat better classroom management (though this was still a concern in multiple classrooms); horizontal articulation; staff collegiality and shared responsibility; student discourse; and use of classroom questioning strategies.
- Decreases in differentiated instruction; and use of summative data to guide instruction; and
- No change and continued “partial proficiency” in implementing culturally responsive instruction; teaching to the Common Core and at appropriate levels of cognitive demand; using formative assessments and providing timely and constructive feedback; employing effective interventions and assistance within the classroom; high expectations for student performance; and helping students to become college and career ready.

Changes in ratings of support for teaching and learning were more positive, with increased ratings on seven of the nine indicators. Changes in ratings included:

- Increases in creating and implementing a clear shared vision and mission; focusing on school improvement; focusing on improving and supporting effective instruction; implementing effective resource allocation; monitoring the use of instructional time; implementing

professional development focused on student achievement; and providing more parent access to information; and

- Ratings remained the same in two areas: monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and family engagement, with both areas showing more activity but limited impact.

Changes in school climate as measured by the district survey were also provided, with mostly positive results indicating an improved school climate. A few remaining challenges, such as cell phone usage and hall monitor behavior, were also discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Address the student absenteeism issue.** Root causes of student absenteeism often focus on a lack of perceived value of education, a lack of academically engaging instruction, a lack of differentiated instruction such that the pacing is too fast or too slow; ineffective learning supports and interventions; a poor interpersonal relationship with teachers, administrators, or staff; and too little autonomy and ability to express oneself in unique ways. The school should study the likely reasons for absenteeism by conducting focus groups with students and reviewing the research literature; should investigate strategies that have been effective at other high schools with characteristics similar to ACHS; and plan an initiative to increase student attendance.
- 2. Implement an improved strategy for reducing truancy and addressing discipline.** The accountability walks have met with partial success and signals have been sent about the need to get to class on time. However, the policy had unintentional outcomes. Consider instead piloting or using a restorative justice technique. This approach has been effective at Hinkley High School. If this approach is attractive and the school decides to experiment with it, a good first step is to constitute a student and teacher advisory group or taskforce. Have the group gather input from students and co-design the process within parameters specified by leadership.
- 3. Focus professional learning on instruction and accelerate progress.** The foci from 2013-2014 had a good yield and all of the practices that were promoted should be retained and monitored for implementation. This year, put a focus on implementing highly engaging content instruction completely aligned to the Colorado state standards. Help teachers to learn about Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching*, *Uncommon Schools*, or other pedagogies that have high effect sizes. Provide videotapes and other means for teachers to view models of effective teaching and critique themselves and one another in a safe environment for feedback. Employ more instructional coaches to improve practice. Monitor for implementation. Teachers should learn and utilize "no opt out" and other techniques.
- 4. Help teachers learn how to use data for instructional improvement.** Every teacher should be using formative assessment on a frequent and routine basis so they can check for understanding and mastery and reteach as needed. Help them to gain easy access to data that can be analyzed all the way down to the misconception level. Assist them with the analysis until they become adept enough to analyze data on their own.

5. **Provide better after-school interventions for students.** Consider adding more effective computer-assisted instruction to the suite of interventions available for students. Add more access to highly-effective programming for English language learning to students who are not fluent in English. Add skills-based programming in other content areas.
6. **Encourage all adults in the building to know and greet the students by name.** Every adult in the building should make an effort to call students by name, greet them when they see them, and establish a positive relationship. Consider asking every adult in the building to identify several students that he/she mentors. It is important to get to know the students and their concerns. Every adult should take an hour a week to meet with mentees and establish mutually beneficial relationships.
7. **Have more events targeted to school pride and attachment.** Constitute a student leadership group to help, and hold more routine pep rallies, school spirit events, and recognition of students who succeed in academics, athletics, the arts, and other areas. Ask staff to attend events more often and support the students. Involve students in more decision making and help them to take ownership in the appearance of the school and planning school events.
8. **Establish more career pathways.** Consider as a long-term initiative administering Work Keys or another assessment to all ninth-grade students and help them formulate a personal learning plan that takes them at least through 2 years beyond high school. To the extent possible, provide more career pathways for students. Expand the health sciences program and add other areas of interest, such as technology, robotics, or engineering; environmental science and agriculture; communications or other areas that can be supported by local corporations with internships and coursework.
9. **Continue efforts to engage parents/guardians.** Conduct a needs assessment to understand the topics of most concern to parents and then make plans to meet their needs. Provide them with information that shows the value of education, the jobs their students can acquire, and career pathways.
10. **Attend to some of the “little” things.** A number of small issues were identified in this report that served to undermine the positive change going on. Take care of some of the little issues to send the message that everyone is listening and cares. Move the police car into the parking lot rather than parking it at the front of the building. Ensure monitors do not congregate and talk only with each other rather than the students. Have students make some of the announcements. Monitor the Gaudy goals to ensure they reflect high expectations. Repair the bathrooms. Correct the misspellings on the signs. Serve ethnically appealing foods at parent events. Notice small improvements and recognize them.

CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

This report is organized into several sections. The first section provides background on ACHS, including information about its student demographics and academic achievement; findings from the 2013 instructional audit; and contents of the school’s UIP and TIG. The second section summarizes the approach used to collect information for this report. The third section contains an analysis of ACHS’s fidelity to the UIP and TIG application. ACHS’ activities implemented in alignment with the UIP and TIG

plans are reviewed. The fourth section provides an analysis of the ways that ACHS addressed the specific challenges identified in the 2013 instructional audit and differences in practices and impacts since the audit was conducted. The final section provides a set of conclusions and recommendations for Aurora Public Schools (APS) and ACHS leaders to consider.

BACKGROUND

This section provides information about ACHS, including its student demographics and academic achievement, findings from the 2013 school instructional audit, and improvement plans as articulated in ACHS' 2013-2014 Unified Improvement Plan and Tiered Intervention Grant.

ACHS DEMOGRAPHICS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

ACHS is a comprehensive high school that serves approximately 2,086 students. The student population is 66.5% Hispanic; 15.9% Black/African American; 8.9% Asian; 5.3% White; and 3.4% other. Nearly 42% of the student population speaks a home language other than English. About 12% of the students qualify for special education services. The school also has a higher percentage (14.3%) of students designated as refugees, most of whom spoke no English when they arrived at the school. Nearly 92% of the students qualify for free and reduced price meals, and 7% are classified as homeless.

The school has a history of poor academic performance. Last year, only 34.8% scored proficient or advanced in reading; 11.9% scored proficient or advanced in mathematics; 15.9% scored proficient or advanced in writing; and 14.6% scored proficient or advanced in science. Median growth percentiles were well below expectations, though the school was rated “approaching” in reading, mathematics, and writing, but the school did not meet expectations in English language proficiency growth. The graduation rate was 57.1% using a 7-year calculation. The dropout rate was 9.9% and the mean ACT composite score was 15.1.

FINDINGS FROM THE 2013 INSTRUCTIONAL AUDIT

RMC Research conducted an instructional audit at the school in the spring of 2013. A range of strengths and challenges were identified:

- Teachers have command of their subject matter and many have considerable content and pedagogical expertise. Nearly all teachers communicate clearly and accurately in the learning environment. The school has adequate levels of materials and supplies to support teaching and learning. Teachers administer appropriate summative and benchmark assessments and use the results to refine their teaching each year and guide reteaching when students have not mastered materials.
- Teachers do not adequately communicate lesson objectives to students to help them understand specific learning goals and expectations for demonstrating proficiency. Classrooms are not consistently well managed to make efficient use of instructional time and promote students' active engagement in learning. Pacing is very slow in many classrooms, with a lot of wasted time. Most teachers do not use culturally responsive instructional techniques. Very few differentiate instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. Only some teachers consistently use strategies known to be effective for English language learners.

- While some teachers have high expectations for student learning, many do not and allow the students to work on grade levels far below their potential and skill level. Cognitive demand and rigor in many classes is very low, though there were multiple stellar exceptions to this finding. Most teachers do not provide students with opportunities to apply learning and many do not make the learning as relevant as they should, though again, there were strong exceptions where teachers' classrooms were highly relevant and application opportunities were offered.
- Many students are clearly off task while in the classroom, and many report that instruction is not engaging or interesting. However, once again, there are clear exceptions, with some teachers using project-based learning, hands-on learning, engaging classroom activities that focus on student interaction, and other similarly interesting assignments.
- Students do not receive the interventions they need for remediation and accelerated learning. Struggling students receive some help, but the assistance is not routine and there are too few avenues to get the type of help they need except through online interventions that may or may not directly address their needs. Students who are in Advanced Placement and Honors classes are receiving rigorous instruction. Most of those in the Health Sciences Academies are also exposed to appropriate rigor. However, those accelerated learners in traditional classrooms also have too few opportunities for enrichment.
- Formative assessments and checks for understanding occur too infrequently. Several teachers only administer unit tests and required assessments. Some teachers do not engage all students and only call on a few students. In a few cases, teachers appear to have given up on many students who simply occupy seats, sometimes texting or listening to music and sometimes sleeping. Feedback is not provided to students often enough, and very few students have specific goals or track progress.
- The school does not do enough to promote horizontal or vertical articulation, even though there are times set aside for professional learning communities (PLCs). By most accounts, some PLCs are very productive and valuable, but others are not.

The most significant challenge the school faced at the time of the audit was student behavior/discipline. By nearly all accounts, the students rule the school and behavioral consequences are nearly non-existent. This has resulted in an environment where students are sometimes rude and disrespectful to each other and adults. They linger in corners of the hallways and in the restrooms. They say there are no consequences, so collecting tardy slips has become a hobby for some.

This disciplinary issue results in low morale among the serious students and those who want to succeed. Many students have a strong motivation to learn and to go to college, and many are confident learners. However, even these students acknowledge that too few adults care about them, the environment for learning is poor, and they are not attached to the school. Even the physical environment is seen as problematic for many students, who say that the building is not clean or conducive to learning. This disciplinary issue is urgent and critical since it has such strong negative effects on both adults and students in the school.

Leadership was problematic since the principal was informed in October that she would not be renewed at the school for next year. While she continued to work diligently as did her assistant principals, their

collective and individual leadership was not viewed as effective. Strengths and challenges in the domain of support for improvement included:

- The staff shares the mission of helping all students to become college and career ready and to raise test scores, but few understand the vision for achieving that goal other than to concentrate on a few students who are on the cusp of proficiency.
- Teachers want to do well, but feel that the assistance provided to them to improve is inadequate. They do not have a clear vision of instructional effectiveness, are not consistently monitored for effectiveness, and feel that the monitoring that does occur is targeted to individuals due to personality conflicts rather than performance. Some teachers try to help each other but do not feel that the school nor district administrators and coaches are effective in helping them.
- Instructional time is poorly planned given the schedule of classes for grade levels, with only five required classes for seniors, and six for sophomores and juniors. Some incredibly large classes, such as physical education, cannot be conducted for the full period simply because of attendance-taking demands. The house approach being used in the school is considered ineffective by most teachers since younger students lack role models, though some teachers and students like the looping since they get to know their teachers better.
- The professional development that was given was not valued by the teachers and not viewed as influencing achievement. Parents are often disengaged and are very concerned about the morale and discipline policy at the school. Parents report that they receive adequate information about school progress, but are concerned about the school overall.

In short, the school was in urgent need for improvement.

ACHS UNIFIED IMPROVEMENT PLAN (UIP)

ACHS' UIP was submitted on August 31, 2013. The plan noted that ACHS was identified as a priority improvement school, entering year two. This means that the school had not yet met state expectations for goal attainment on the State Performance Framework (SPF) indicators. Specifically, the school did not meet goals for academic achievement; academic growth; academic growth gaps; or postsecondary and workforce readiness.

The school was awarded a TIG to help them accelerate progress. The TIG required the school to appoint a turnaround principal, hire additional leaders to assist in supporting staff in improving their practices, make significant programmatic and operational changes in the school, and engage in continuous improvement processes.

The school conducted a root cause analysis and reported that the poor academic achievement was related to a:

- lack of differentiated professional learning opportunities that would lead to rigorous, engaging first instruction that emphasizes literacy, language, and critical thinking across all content areas; and

- a school culture that is not characterized by shared responsibility to increase student achievement, accelerate growth, and meet postsecondary workforce readiness skills.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

ACHS identified four major strategies for improvement:

1. **Curriculum and Instruction.** Provide differentiated professional learning that leads to rigorous, engaging first instruction which emphasizes literacy, language, and critical thinking across all content.
2. **Equity and Engagement.** Foster a school culture in which all stakeholders have a shared responsibility to increase student achievement, accelerate growth, and meet postsecondary readiness goals.
3. **Communication and Accountability.** Increase achievement and graduation rates while decreasing growth gaps and drop-out rates by raising attendance and providing targeted interventions for students.
4. **Campus and Community.** Increase parental involvement and create a community perception that the school is welcoming by increasing communications, outreach, and access to develop a home and school connection.

TIERED INTERVENTION GRANT (TIG)

ACHS was awarded a 3-year TIG grant in May 2013. For the first year of the grant, the district requested \$984,138; for the second year, they requested \$945,503; and for the third year, they requested \$796,299 for a grand total of \$2,725,907. The funds were proposed to be allocated such that:

- \$42,853 was dedicated to pre-implementation activities. These funds were used to pay for the instructional audit; a grant project coordinator; and a teacher on special assignment (TOSA), to coordinate a Newcomer program.
- \$2,106,976 was allocated to implementation costs. Of these, 78% cover salaries for additional staff to monitor grant implementation, improve systems and structures to support students and families and for professional learning opportunities for teachers. Approximately \$169,200 was dedicated to funding experts to provide professional learning and support in culture and climate; English language acquisition and culturally responsive environment. The remaining \$396,878 was used to fund staff time to engage in professional development.
- \$257,715 was used to hire a grant project coordinator to support the principal and director of student achievement to ensure day-to-day implementation and budget monitoring.

The TIG application documented the district's and school's readiness for implementing significant change in the school by adopting a transformation model.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The TIG included the strategies in the UIP and contained additional strategies aligned with TIG requirements. The additional strategies were:

1. **Leadership.** Hire a transformation principal and allow the principal to hire a new administrative team; restructure the school day; and recruit, interview, and hire staff whose salaries are paid by the TIG.
2. **Flexibility.** Schedule additional professional development at times convenient to the ACHS staff. Additional affordances were also provided to the principal so that he had more flexibility for scheduling, staffing, and incentivizing students.
3. **Local Education Agency (LEA) Support.** Enhance the probability of success by implementing LEA-supported strategies, that include:
 - hiring an additional assistant principal;
 - increasing the professional learning for administrators;
 - hiring a cross-content literacy teacher-coach;
 - increasing time onsite from the district director of student achievement;
 - increasing coaching support;
 - increasing literacy and mathematics coaching support; and
 - increasing data collection and analysis support.
4. **Ongoing Technical Assistance and Progress Monitoring.** Provide ongoing, intensive technical assistance and support from the LEA on a monthly basis.
5. **Accountability.** Implement a new teacher evaluation system.
6. **Consequences.** As appropriate, rewarding leaders, teachers, and staff who have increased student performance and identify and remove those who have not improved their professional practice after ample opportunities have been provided.

METHODOLOGY USED FOR DATA COLLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS

This section provides information on the methodology used for data collection to determine fidelity to the UIP and TIG and changes in practice since the 2013 instructional audit.

In April, 2014, RMC Research was asked to conduct a progress monitoring visit to Aurora Central High School to ascertain fidelity to its UIP and TIG application. APS leaders also asked RMC to document changes that had occurred in the past year, and to ascertain whether progress had been made in addressing any of the instructional audit findings. Finally, recommendations for next year were solicited.

RMC Research staff met with district leaders and the school principal to plan the site visit. Multiple documents were provided to RMC, including copies of the UIP, TIG application, descriptions of professional development provided to ACHS staff, and ACHS progress reports delivered to the Aurora Board of Education.

RMC's site visit to the school took place on April 24, 25, and 28, 2014. Three RMC staff members observed classrooms (primarily in core content areas), conducted interviews with all administrators and department chairs, and moderated focus groups with randomly selected teachers and students. In addition, interviews or focus groups were conducted with counselors, deans, secretarial staff and clerks, and other staff who requested interviews. Randomly selected students were also briefly interviewed during their lunch periods and times where they gathered in the hallways or outdoors. Exhibit 1 shows the total number of staff from whom data were collected, by method. Finally, APS staff who worked closely with the site were interviewed. Data were analyzed for trends and to determine changes in practices and impact.

EXHIBIT 1. DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

	Administrators	Teachers	Other Staff	Students	TOTAL
Observations		35			35
Interviews	4	17	6		27
Focus Groups		21	9	9	39
Random Interviews		4	11	62	77

ACHS FIDELITY TO THE UIP AND TIG

This section provides information on ACHS' implementation of activities aligned to the strategies and activities stated in the UIP and TIG, organized by the four strategies presented in the UIP and the ten strategies in the TIG. Respondents' perceptions of the quality of the work and impact are also presented.

ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN TO FULFILL THE UIP

UIP Strategy 1. Curriculum and Instruction. Provide differentiated professional learning that leads to rigorous, engaging first instruction which emphasizes literacy, language, and critical thinking across all content.

ACHS proposed a series of professional development sessions on instructional design, building teacher capacity to implement culturally relevant instruction, best practices for English learning acquisition, progress monitoring, and protocols for data examination. The school and district also provided staff development sessions to help teachers work together as a PLC focused on implementing common effective practices. Coaches were appointed to increase teacher capacity to provide differentiated instructional strategies, and staff were encouraged to analyze data related to student performance and use results to improve instructional approaches. Most of the activities implemented to address this strategy were successful. Specific activities implemented and respondents' reactions to them included:

A. Focused Differentiated Professional Development

The following areas were the focus for professional learning:

- 1. Writing.** The school created and implemented a series of professional development sessions and individualized teacher support to address writing using a TOSA and an outside consultant. Every teacher was asked to require a significant amount of writing in their classes. Teachers were given instruction in how to facilitate writing in the content areas. The sessions were well-organized, with specifications of learning targets, success criteria, and exit criteria. Teachers were provided with sentence frames and other activities to assist them and were asked to submit sample lesson plans that reflected the skills they had acquired as a result of attending the sessions. Observations showed and respondents in focus groups and interviews reported that writing activities increased substantially this year, with students required to write in nearly every class. At the time of RMC's site visit, most students were writing two-three paragraphs in response to an assignment.
- 2. Constructing Meaning/English Language Acquisition.** Ellen Levy, a consultant from California, provided a series of professional development sessions on Constructing Meaning, an approach that promotes learning goals that include both content and language objectives. Targeted to English learners but useful for all students, constructing meaning uses a functional language approach that focuses on specific critical tasks and text structures that promote academic language acquisition. When implemented fully, the approach divides lessons into measurable skills, tasks, or objectives that move students over time into larger, more complex tasks. Part of the promotion of constructing meaning is

student dialogue, which strongly encourages students to utilize oral and written language skills. During these sessions, teachers learned how to help students to construct meaning and how to design instruction aligned to the Common Core and benchmark assessments. Respondents had mixed views of the professional development provided for this task. Some reported that the sessions lacked depth and were too narrow in their scope. Some teachers, but not all, reported that they had attempted to implement the skills they learned in this area. Observations showed similarly mixed results, with some teachers clearly posting or explaining academic terms and some teachers strongly promoting student discussion and dialogue. However, many of the instructional techniques encouraged by this approach (such as turn and talk, student discussion of open-ended questions, and student discussion of potential answers to questions or prompts) were infrequently observed.

- 3. Mathematics Instruction.** In the spring of 2013, ACHS contracted with the Teacher Development Group to provide in-depth professional development to mathematics teachers on effective standards-based instruction. Mathematics teachers were told to do “whatever it takes” to be successful. This meant that they could resequence the curriculum, add or subtract activities suggested by the district pacing guide, and otherwise determine the best way to meet student needs and accelerate progress. At least some teachers were told that they would work with the same ninth grade students for 2 years to ensure continuity. The teachers received individualized coaching and participated in multiple conversations about why and how various instructional strategies work to create student buy-in. According to respondents, the assistance has been very valuable. Some teachers have made significant changes to their teaching in terms of what and how they are teaching. Others have made fewer or no changes. Respondents believe that some teachers are simply more open to change than others. Administrators have noticed the varying levels of receptivity and are making changes to assignments as a strategy for accelerating progress.
- 4. Instructional Framework and Lesson Plan Structure.** Teachers were provided professional development and asked to align their lesson planning to the Madeline Hunter approach. This approach asks teachers to develop an anticipatory set to activate students’ prior knowledge; statements of objective or purpose; instructional inputs/direct instruction, which specifies the knowledge to be communicated; modeling to demonstrate skills to be acquired; checking for understanding; guided practice with close monitoring; and independent practice. Teachers reported that they were familiar with the approach and had built and submitted lesson plans aligned with the approach, though some reported and observations confirmed that only some teachers implemented the practice.
- 5. Increasing Rigor.** Teachers were provided with a keynote speech by Mike Schmoker, who focused on increasing student achievement by increasing the rigor of instruction for all students. Dr. Schmoker emphasized the need for learning targets and clear learning objectives, teaching to standards, using data for improvement, and powerful instructional strategies. Teachers found the speech to be inspiring, but the speech was not specifically translated into action steps or followed up in a particular way.
- 6. Provision of Coaching.** TOSAs were asked to serve as instructional coaches to help any teacher who was struggling to improve their teaching practices. TOSAs were assigned to help with English language learners, English/language arts, mathematics, and science. Coaches received mixed reviews, with some being perceived as very helpful and others as

relatively ineffective. Administrators made some changes to coaching assignments midyear and have made other changes to take effect next year.

B. Developing Shared Responsibility by Creating Communities of Practice

- 1. District-Sponsored Community of Practice Professional Development.** APS sponsored bi-weekly professional development sessions for teachers at ACHS on how to create a unified and systematic community of practice. The district provided sessions that were meant to help teachers ensure that students are engaged in high leverage, cognitively demanding tasks that lead to successful student independent practice; identify levels of content and language proficiency; support the implementation of the Common Core standards; and support teachers in understanding the new evaluation system. The sessions also promoted student discourse, helping students with justification/argumentation, and disciplinary literacies across the content areas. These sessions received mixed reviews from ACHS teachers. While some saw the value of the information, many expressed disappointment in the training either because they viewed it as duplicative of school-level efforts or as being too superficial.
- 2. Implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)s.** Prior to the 2013-2014 school year, ACHS had functioning PLCs but their work varied depending upon the content area and grade-level groups. This year, the PLCs also routinely met, and spent more time co-planning, reviewing data, and discussing strategies for instructional improvement. However, respondents reported continuing wide variation in the effectiveness of the PLCs, with some believing that the PLCs were very effective and others reporting that the time spent was not well-used. While co-planning was much more frequent than last year, the groups did not routinely review data. They looked at Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) scores once; reviewed Acuity scores once fairly soon after they were available; and rarely looked at classroom assessment results. Respondents reported that data were not provided to them in a user-friendly form and that while some felt adept and created common assessments, others noted that they did not know how to construct a meaningful classroom assessment or how to interpret the data they received.
- 3. Gaudy Goals.** Coined by Eric Jensen, the author of several books on “brain-based teaching,” Gaudy goals are defined as classroom goals that reflect exceptionally high expectations for learning. Every teacher is expected to post Gaudy student achievement goals for his/her classes. Observations showed that most teachers posted goals, some of which were ambitious (85% of students will score proficient or advanced on the TCAP) and others of which reflected low expectations (“At least 50% of students who regularly attend my class will pass my course (paraphrased).”

C. Data Analysis for Progress Monitoring and Instructional Improvement

- 1. Data TOSA to provide data reports for teachers and monitor data on student performance; establish protocols for teachers to examine instructional data.** Respondents reported that they were provided with TCAP reports at the beginning of the year; with Acuity reports; and with school climate data. However, they were not given instruction on how to interpret the data. In addition, many of the teachers were uncertain how to use the data for improvement given that the data represented students’ past performance. However,

teachers reported and observations confirmed that there was more use of classroom assessments than had been the case in the past. The assessments were used to help teachers understand what to reteach.

UIP Strategy 2. Equity and Engagement. We foster a school culture in which all stakeholders have a shared responsibility to increase student achievement, accelerate growth, and meet postsecondary readiness goals.

Planned activities in this strategy area included an analysis of discipline, attendance, and truancy data to develop effective responses; hiring a community liaison to bring parents and partners into the school building (discussed below under Strategy 3); providing students leadership and after-school activities and clubs; holding town halls, and providing middle school feeder orientation sessions. Multiple additional activities were also conducted as part of this strategy, as described below.

A. Improving School Culture/Student Attachment to the School

- 1. Improving the Physical Appearance of the School.** Before school began, the principal improved the physical appearance of the school. Walls were painted, piles of papers, files, and other seemingly non-pertinent information was removed, and signs were added. The rationale for doing this was to make the school feel like it was fresh, clean, and uncluttered, thereby promoting pride in the school. Most respondents were appreciative of the work, but a few complained that important papers were no longer available because staff were not asked to review the papers before they were discarded.
- 2. Creating a New Mission and Motto.** Leaders at ACHS developed a new mission that reflected the new areas of focus for the school: “Aurora Central High School seeks to teach our students in a safe, supportive environment the knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors necessary to become responsible and productive members of a diverse society. We provide instruction in all subject areas, focusing on enabling students to demonstrate effective communications through reading, writing, speaking, listening, reasoning, and technology literacy.” Leadership also created a new motto: “We ARE Central.” The motto is displayed in the common areas and in some hallways, and ACHS staff sometimes wear shirts or jackets with the motto emblazoned on them. Students and teachers reported that they initially liked the motto since it was a rallying cry and signaled strong attachment and pride in the school. Over time, some students wondered what the meaning of the motto became since apparently some community members interpreted the motto negatively, suggesting that being Central had no meaning in terms of a symbol of strength, hope, or achievement. The website suggests, however, that the motto can be used to symbolize those aspirations. The website says, for example, “We ARE . . . academics,” activities, athletics, and community. While the motto can be “hijacked,” many believe that as school spirit grows, it will become a positive symbol of the school.
- 3. Making Daily Announcements.** ACHS reinstated daily announcements, which occur in the afternoon for 2 to 3 minutes. Announcements are made by an assistant principal, and extra time was allotted to fifth period for that purpose and to ensure no instructional time was lost. Respondents believe that daily announcements represent a positive change and have improved communication flow. Some suggested that in the future, it would be a good idea

to have student leaders make the announcements rather than an assistant principal so that they would take more ownership over communication to fellow students.

- 4. Holding a Pep Rally.** ACHS held a student pep rally in the fall, which was well-received by students, teachers, and staff. The pep rally was reported to be fun and novel, and served to reinforce the new motto, We ARE Central. Other pep rallies were planned but not implemented. One was cancelled due to weather. Others never got off the ground since no one volunteered to plan them. Nearly all respondents were disappointed that additional pep rallies were not held. Students interpreted the lack of events as being a sign that the school staff did not believe it was worth their time to do extra things for the students. Some thought that the pep rallies were cancelled to punish the students. Several respondents pointed out that no one ever communicated the reason why the pep rallies were terminated. Some students said that they would have taken leadership if they knew that staff were not stepping up. In addition, some students mentioned that the pep rally was connected to football, but when basketball, track, and other athletic seasons came up, no rallies were held and the teams were not particularly well supported in announcements or wishes for success. Students felt that the lack of attention to other sports appeared to denigrate those sports. They also pointed out that few staff attended their games.
- 5. Sponsoring Clubs and Programs.** To increase school pride and attachment, ACHS created and implemented a large number of after-school clubs and programs. Partners sponsored many of these clubs. Examples include the following:

 - Lutheran Family Services staff work with refugee students to improve academic performance and sponsors a Thursday job club. About 49 students have been involved.
 - Goodwill provides college preparation courses and refugee services, and helps students with career connections. About 373 students have participated in the services.
 - Jewish Family Services provides counseling and group sessions for refugee students. About 62 students have attended sessions or joined clubs such as the newcomer group; Nepali Boys' Club, or African Girls' Groups.
 - Colorado Youth at Risk provides mentoring to students, along with enrichment and support opportunities. About 120 students have participated in these programs.
 - Boys Hope Girls Hope works with 15 freshmen and 15 sophomores, providing scholarships, tutoring, mentoring, and life skills.
 - Art from Ashes is a program that uses poetry and speech to provide opportunities for "troubled" youth to be heard. Offered as an after-school program, about 12 students have attended.
 - Parents and Youth United (Padres and Jovenes Unidos) provides opportunities for students to learn about educational justice and immigrant rights and helps them develop student leadership skills. About 11 students have participated in the program.

- Agape-Sataygraha provides a mentoring program that helps students learn conflict management and peacemaking skills. About 10 students attended the program.
- Health Consciousness Ambassador Scholarship is a pilot program to teach students about spiritual health and how to make culturally appropriate and feasible changes to their lives. Six students participated in the course.

Multiple external programs are also provided in the school to help students explore careers, learn about pregnancy and child care, engage in computer gaming, and more.

As the number of participants suggest, the clubs were not well attended, though the students who participated believed that their attendance was worthwhile. When asked why so few students participated, some students replied that the club membership was either too narrowly defined or because the club's purpose did not match student interests. Students suggested that they should be allowed to have input and form their clubs based on their interest rather than having something imposed by others. Some students disagreed, commenting that these clubs serve a useful purpose and that clubs should be added rather than substituted.

- 6. Hold Multi-Cultural Town Halls.** Respondents could not recall having multi-cultural town halls, though they did discuss having many parent meetings that were intended to bring parents together and celebrate their heritage. Students recalled one assembly that they had that celebrated diversity, but were not able to remember details.
- 7. Hold Middle School Feeder Pattern Orientation Sessions.** Respondents did not provide any information on this activity, though several thought this was an activity planned for late spring.

UIP Strategy 3. Communication and Accountability. We increase achievement and graduation rates while decreasing growth gaps and drop-out rates by raising attendance and providing targeted interventions for students.

This strategy included the establishment of systems to monitor and intervene with students who are failing or at risk of failing their classes, increase communication with parents, and recognize student performance. The strategies met with mixed success. The activities that were implemented and the respondents' reviews of the strategies are presented here.

- A. Early Warning Interventionists (EWIs).** Six teachers were hired to serve as EWIs for ninth- and tenth-grade students who are at risk of failing or have failed courses to help them. EWIs work with students to help them with homework and credit accrual. They provide information to assist students with study skills and dispositions related to on-time graduation. The EWIs also reach out to parents to explain policies and why students need to be at school on time. Absences of all students are monitored, along with grades, credits, behavior, and disciplinary referrals.

Students reported that the EWIs were helpful and that the students were able to accelerate their progress with the assistance provided. Other respondents, though, questioned whether the results were worth the expenditure. Very few students were served, according to these respondents. Some respondents believed the assistance should have been provided to juniors

and seniors rather than to freshmen and sophomores since the need was greater for the upperclassmen. Others thought that targeting the newer students was better since the cohort approach would pay off in the long run as the students moved through the grade levels. Several students pointed out that they believed that targeting to the ninth and tenth graders was one of many signals that the school had “given up” on upperclassmen, adding fuel to the perception that some educators were pushing them to drop out rather than to stay in school.

- B. Counseling.** One counselor is devoted to ninth-grade students and another to tenth-grade students to help them address any challenges associated with absenteeism and incomplete work. Counselors monitor absences, grades, credits, behavior, discipline, and parent contacts. Students and other respondents reported that the counseling was useful but not plentiful enough.
- C. After-School and Saturday Tutoring.** To assist students with raising their grades and performing better on academic assessments, the school instituted an after-school tutoring program. Teachers were provided with a \$40/hour stipend for 3 hours each week to provide tutoring for students after school or on Saturday. Over time, due to the decrease in demand, the number of hours devoted to after-school tutoring was dropped to 2 hours and then to one hour. Transportation was offered to ensure that participating students could have a ride home. Respondents reported that about 25 to 30 students participated each day in the after-school tutoring. Both students and teachers believed that the after-school tutoring was helpful to students who came voluntarily to improve their performance. However, both groups acknowledged that too few students participated and that there should be better “marketing” and incentives for students to attend.
- D. Meeting with At-Risk Students.** The principal held a meeting with ninth and tenth grade students who were at-risk of course failure to tell them about their options for summer school and to warn them about the dangers of falling behind in credit accrual. According to respondents, the event was well-done and served to prompt action on the part of the students.
- E. Round Up of Displaced Students and Super Seniors.** ACHS spent a good deal of effort in identifying and contacting students who had dropped out of high school because they had too few credits to graduate (displaced students) and communicating with overage students (super seniors) to encourage them to participate in E2020 or other activities that would lead to high school completion with either a diploma or a GED. This effort resulted in about 55 students being graduated midyear, raising the school’s graduation rate by 6%.
- F. Tardy Sweeps/Accountability Walks.** At the beginning of the school year, students and staff were apprised of a new policy designed to decrease tardiness and truancy. Students were to be in class on time or receive referrals/detentions. Deans, administrators, and school monitors conducted “tardy sweeps” immediately after bells rang signaling the beginning of class, giving the students detention slips and warning them that there would be negative consequences if they continued to be late for class. Any student in the hallways, common areas, or areas surrounding the school was provided with the warning and consequences. The nature of the warnings were described variously by stakeholder groups, with some saying that the warnings were stern but stated positively and others reporting that the warnings were threatening and punitive. Some respondents believed that particular students were targeted for threats and that African Americans were identified in the “sweeps” more often than others. A parent complained

and the name “tardy sweep” was changed to “accountability walk,” and all staff were reminded to be positive and to provide the same warnings for all. Teachers were given more responsibility for assigning detentions when a student was tardy.

Results for the initial “tardy sweeps” were reported to be mixed. On the positive side, the sweeps resulted in few or no students in the hallways, common areas, or areas immediately surrounding the schools when the “sweeps” occurred and at other times as well. Students received the message that they must be in class on time or suffer the consequences. Many students served their detention time and started coming to class on time. However, on the negative side, some students who were running late chose to leave the school completely rather than to be late and serve detention. Other students received detention slips, but when they failed to show up for detention, suffered no consequences. Still others reported that their friends felt that the school had become “militaristic” and that they wanted no part of the school and dropped out. Some students taunted the deans, calling them “Zimmerman,” implying that they were acting like vigilantes and were targeting African American students. Finally, many reported that the detention was a “joke” and that they spent their time in the Learning Center playing games and socializing with one another or listening to music, making the time more pleasant than being in class.

By most accounts, the accountability walks did not have the same results as the “tardy sweeps,” since many students suffered no consequences when they were accompanied to class. On the other hand, many teachers believed that the accountability walks produced more favorable results since students missed only a few minutes of class rather than half the class since it took a lot of time to process the detention slips for all of the tardy students. Respondents agreed that accountability walks were not consistently reinforced, with some students receiving detention and others receiving a warning.

All agreed that the discipline in the school had improved since last year. Observations also showed that there were far fewer students in hallways or common areas during class than had been the case last year.

Ultimately, the policy had both intended and unintended consequences. On the positive side, the change in policy meant that the school was no longer chaotic; that adults, rather than students, clearly were in charge of the school and its policies; and that students understood that their actions had consequences, at least most of the time. On the negative side, students perceived that they were being treated disrespectfully, that the school did not have a positive culture, and that the school appeared to be sending a message that it was better for them to drop out than to be late. (Recommendations for alternative approaches are provided in the last section of this report.)

- G. Communication with Parents/Guardians about Student Achievement.** Several activities were put into place to communicate both positive messages and concerns about student achievement. The principal sent home a weekly newsletter to the parents and teachers were asked to contact parents with both good news if the student had performed well or with information conveying concerns about student progress. Robo-calls were made to communicate with any parent/guardian whose children received a D or F grade that week. Most respondents reported that these were effective techniques to use if and when a parent was actually reached

and cared about their children’s progress. Some teachers, though, complained that the effort was very time-consuming and required several hours of extra work each week.

- H. **Rewards for Positive Behaviors.** An ice cream “social” was provided for all students with 90% attendance or above during the site visit. Students were dismissed from their fifth and sixth period classes to attend. The process was a bit disorganized in some classrooms since some students received excuse forms while others did not and simply had their names posted on a list that was sent to them. Some teachers requested that the students have the proper forms or they could not attend. This caused conflict, which was ultimately resolved by asking the students to go to the office to get the form. Nonparticipating students, however, were often disruptive in their classes during the time that the other students were gone. Participating students said they appreciated the ice cream and the time off from their class. However, they also said that while the acknowledgement was nice, it really was not an incentive for them to attend class more often. Some believed it was the type of reward that elementary students should receive and thought it was not the best reward for high school students. In addition, honors students and others with high grades pointed out that there was little public recognition for their hard work. They thought their achievement was much greater than “just coming to class.”
- I. **Assembly for refugee students and families.** ACHS held an assembly for refugee students and their families to explain school rules and the need for students to attend school every day. The assembly received mixed results. Some thought it was an important reminder to families about school norms in America. Others said that family members were confused by the information.

UIP Strategy 4. Campus and Community. We increase parental involvement and create a community perception that the school is welcoming by increasing communications, outreach, and access to develop a home and school connection.

ACHS identified a TOSA to service as the community liaison for the school. Responsibilities included meeting with community partners to discuss how to enhance supports for students and staff; connecting staff and students with community resources; providing opportunities for community partners to visit the school and interact with parents and students; plan and organize events for students and teachers; plan parent coffees and other parent and community events; and arrange for various logistics.

A. Connecting Parents and Families to the School

This year, many activities intended to bring parents and community partners to the school were implemented:

1. **Parenting Matters Programs.** In partnership with Colorado State University, ACHS provided four educational events for parents. The first was entitled “Brain-Wise Training” and was attended by 6 staff members and 3 community members. The next three were positioned as Parent Talks (parenting classes) and were attended by 12, 6, and 7 parents respectively in January, February, and March.
2. **Parent Coffees.** Parent coffees were held approximately once a month, and were designed to inform parents about a variety of ACHS-related topics. Participation ranged from 6 to 60 parents, with the most participating in September and October.

3. **Parent Classes.** Parents were invited to attend Zumba classes and computer classes twice per week. Five community members attended Zumba classes and six parents attended computer classes.
4. **Parent Learning Walks.** Five parents participated in a parent learning walk in April, where parents observed classrooms and provided feedback. Parents identified strengths and concerns at the end of the sessions. They were generally very enthusiastic about the changes in the school and the level of instruction in the classes.
5. **Donuts with Dads; Muffins with Moms; Basketball with Dads.** Parents were invited to a session in February to spend 30 minutes with their children. Six fathers/guardians and eight mothers/guardians attended. One father attended an open-gym basketball night.
6. **Together Colorado.** About 35 parents meet every 2 weeks to discuss communication and to acquire leadership skills.
7. **Spring Institute.** English as a Second Language courses are provided to parents twice per week. About 19 parents have attended.
8. **Spanish Cooking Class.** Ten groups of parents have attended Spanish cooking classes where they learn how to shop for and cook healthy foods.

While participation numbers are relatively low, respondents pointed out that participation is higher than in the past, and that there is recognition by some in the community that the school is making strong efforts to engage parents and guardians. However, some respondents pointed out that there have been small mistakes that show a lack of sensitivity to the neighborhoods. For example, the school sponsored a spaghetti dinner, which is a meal that did not recognize the culture and culinary preferences of the community.

B. Additional Outreach to the Community

In addition to inviting parents to come onsite to the school, ACHS made other efforts to engage parents and community members.

1. **Website Improvements.** ACHS has made significant improvements to its website, providing pictures of students, information from the principal, and a lot of information for parents in English and in Spanish. According to the UIP, information would also be presented in Nepalese, but that language is not yet available on the site.
2. **Sponsoring Community Breakfasts to Engage Community Partners.** Six community breakfasts were hosted for community members, attended by 12 to 20 community partners and 2 to 12 staff. Community partners also provided professional development to staff, helped to host assemblies, and sponsored tables at parent-student conferences.

TIG REQUIREMENTS

The TIG contained 10 strategies that were to be implemented by the school and/or the district in addition to the strategies in the UIP. The activities related to these strategies and their impacts are as follows:

TIG Strategy 1. Leadership and Change Model. Hire a transformation principal and implement the transformation model.

To address this strategy, APS and ACHS:

A. Adopted the transformation model and hired a principal with a record of transforming low performing schools.

Dr. Mark Roberts became the principal in July 2013. Dr. Roberts had a history of strong performance in California as a high school turnaround principal and by all accounts, relished the opportunity to provide leadership to ACHS and manage the change process. As the sign in his office proclaims, “This ain’t my first rodeo.”

B. Hired three new assistant principals and retained one assistant principal.

Before the principal came to ACHS, the assistant principal interviewed and district staff hired other assistant principals for the building. The number of assistant principals was increased by one so that greater attention could be paid to the various departments. Each assistant principal was given supervisory authority to several departments and allowed to use flexible approaches customized to needs, as long as the overall improvement strategies related to professional learning, school culture, student discipline, student engagement, and parent outreach were followed.

C. Hired 34 new staff members.

One third of the staff was new this year. This created new opportunities to ensure more people were onboard with the vision of the school, and infused new energy in the school. However, many of the new hires were new to the profession, and this imposed challenges, primarily around classroom management.

Impacts of changing staff. Changes in staffing were initially perceived very positively by teachers and students. Nearly all respondents reported that they appreciated having an experienced turnaround principal with a strong vision for improving the school. They understood the rationale for change and liked the bold actions being undertaken. Staff initially were very receptive to the assistant principals and felt that their guidance was helpful. Both the principal and assistant principals were considered to be dedicated to change, well-read in the change process, highly organized to support change, and good role models for the teachers and other staff in the building.

In the fall, strong momentum was built for improvement. Leadership nurtured a “can-do” attitude. Professional learning sessions on writing, lesson planning, and constructing meaning were translated into instruction and teacher practice, with noticeable impacts on student performance. Truancy sweeps cleared the hallways and common areas, providing teachers and staff with a sense that the educators were now in control. Goals were set and posted. The physical appearance of the building was improved;

the pep rally resulted in more student pride and a more positive social environment. Teachers, staff, students and parents noticed the differences and appreciated them.

Starting in about December, respondents noted changes among the administrative leadership team. For reasons unknown to most respondents, administrators no longer had common expectations for the teachers they supervised, with some reportedly being stricter and more demanding than others. Respondents reported rifts in the administrative team, with two individuals being strongly aligned with the principal and two who were perceived as being “on the outs.” Respondents noted antipathy between two of the assistant principals and strained relationships between some of the assistant principals and the principal. Inappropriate accusations were said to have been exchanged. The real rifts and perceived conflicts among administrative staff caused some teachers and other staff at the school to take sides but most staff tried to avoid the situation.

However, some staff reported that there was a new lack of transparency for the actions being undertaken and that to some extent, there was a change in the climate and tone in the building. More blame was placed on the district for placing impediments to change in the way of progress. Individuals were more likely to complain that the district was meddling in school affairs, that the district was providing ineffective professional development to teachers, and that the district curricular resources were poorly developed and badly sequenced. While some disagreed about transparency and tone, nearly all staff noticed that the momentum for change had slowed.

By most accounts, the winter months were relatively stable, with planned improvements being implemented but more slowly than in the past. However, in the early spring, several individuals were notified that their jobs were not going to be renewed and rumors started again. The result of this second round of instability was that some staff became fearful that of their jobs and started looking for other work and others became less collegial. Respondents agreed that some of the individuals who were asked to leave were not very effective and deserved to be dismissed. However, some respondents noted that some effective teachers and staff were also choosing to leave because they felt undervalued and/or targeted.

These types of events are not unusual in transformation models, particularly when staff shake-ups need to occur and enough notice needs to be given for staff to have time to transfer. However, primarily because of the rifts within the administrative team, many respondents felt that the change process was not managed well. When asked why they did not step up to be more positive forces in the change process, some staff reported that they were afraid to do so since they perceived that the principal would not be open to their feedback and that they, too, could be dismissed.

Respondents also noted two other concerns about administrators. The first was a perception that the current set of administrators does not make active attempts to get to know the students. While administrators are visible in the hallways and at lunch, students reported that they are almost never greeted or called by name. Few engage in conversations with administrators except when being rewarded or punished. Some teachers and staff also expressed concern that the administrators did not really know the students and their circumstances and did not particularly reach out to them or send signals that they care.

A second concern had to do with motives. Some believed that the administrators were not there because they cared about ACHS and its students and teachers, but were there primarily to “do the turnaround job” and then leave. This type of sentiment is not unusual in turnaround schools where

some staff feel defensive, but nonetheless the idea of motive and the concern about knowing the students need to be addressed.

Despite concerns, the transformation model that was implemented had many of its intended effects. Multiple strategies for improvement were introduced and momentum for change was created. While adjustments need to be made for next year and progress needs to be accelerated, the school appears to be headed in the right direction.

TIG Strategy 2. Flexibility. Provide operational flexibility for hiring, use of funds, and scheduling.

A. Hiring and staff placement.

The district gave the principal authority to plan and implement the UIP and TIG. As written in the plan, the principal and/or his administrative team:

- a. hired an additional assistant principal;
- b. increased the professional learning for administrators;
- c. hired a cross-content literacy teacher-coach;
- d. increased coaching support;
- e. increased literacy and mathematics coaching support; and
- f. increased data collection and analysis support.

During the year, some personnel were shifted to become department heads and some were appointed as TOSAs and coaches. Changes were made to ensure that the most effective staff were placed in leadership and support positions. Impacts of hiring and staff placement have been discussed in previous sections of this report.

TIG Strategy 3. Provide ongoing, intensive technical assistance and support from the LEA.

A. Provision of LEA Support

The district provided intensive supports to the school through frequent and routine monitoring and discussion of strategies and their impacts by the district director of student achievement. The support was described as being helpful in many ways, but insufficient in other ways. According to respondents, the district did not provide sufficient feedback for administrators and teachers to know whether the district was fully supportive of the school. In addition, as previously mentioned, some felt that the district imposed barriers to change, mostly in their professional development requirements; perceived requirements for following what teachers considered to be inadequate or ineffective curriculum tools; and their perceived interference with the tardy sweeps. Some pointed out that the district did not inform the school well about some of the TIG requirements that needed to be met. Others said that the district was too reactive rather than proactive. An example of this was the fact that the principal was allowed to go to an out-of-state conference during TCAP administration: respondents believed that the administrative team should never have been approved for this activity. The district called the principal back when problems occurred during TCAP administration and some believed that the district should have handled the problem.

TIG Strategy 4. Implement rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals.

A. Pilot the teacher evaluation system.

This strategy is under the auspices of the district and was not specifically investigated as part of this report. However, teachers noted that a new evaluation system was being piloted for teachers during this school year, and that they had received feedback on their performance from the supervisors (assistant principals). Respondents reported that the system was transparent, but they were unsure about the rigor of the system or whether it was being equitably applied.

The principal evaluation system will be piloted in 2014-2015.

TIG Strategy 5. Identify and reward school staff who increase student achievement and support and/or remove those who are not effective.

A. Staff consequences for effectiveness.

Respondents were unclear as to whether or how staff would be identified and rewarded if they increase student achievement. (Student achievement data from the TCAP and ACT are not available until summer and respondents did not believe that Acuity scores were being used for this purpose.) They supposed that their reward would be that they would be asked to stay.

B. Staff consequences for ineffectiveness.

Administrators, teachers, and staff unanimously noted that ineffectiveness was likely to lead to dismissal and that about 30 or more teachers intended to leave the school after this school year, some of whom were dismissed for ineffective performance.

TIG Strategy 6. Implement strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in the turnaround school.

As noted, three new administrators and 34 new teachers were hired in year one, some of whom are being retained and some of whom are not. Recruitment efforts for year two are just beginning.

TIG Strategy 7. Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based, aligned to state content standards, and vertically aligned.

A. Use data to identify and implement an instructional program aligned to needs.

Instructional improvement plans were based on an analysis of student achievement data including the TCAP, ACT, graduation rates, dropout rates, and attendance rates; school climate data; and data from the instructional audit.

B. Provide research-based professional development to all staff.

All of the changes to the instructional program implemented in 2013-2014 were research-based. In fact, the principal strives to bring in national models with records of proven impact on student achievement.

He selected constructing meaning, the Madeline Hunter lesson planning approach, and the emphasis on student discourse based on national research. He often cites research studies that inform his decisions and reaches out to national and regional figures such as Mike Schmoker and Robert Marzano to design and/or articulate the turnaround approach.

TIG Strategy 8. Use student data to inform and differentiate instruction.

A. Use student data to inform instruction.

This was an area that was not implemented well. Teachers reported that they did not receive data in a form that was useful to them. As will be detailed in the next section, teachers are not as adept as they should be in understanding student data and using data for decision making. However, some teachers improved their practices in the creation and use of formative assessment approaches such as using exit tickets and checking for understanding. A few departments created common assessments.

B. Differentiate instruction.

As will be detailed below, there was little evidence of differentiated instruction during the site visit.

TIG Strategy 9. Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time.

A. Establish schedules to provide increased learning time.

When student schedules were established this year, students were strongly encouraged to take five or six classes so that they used their in-school time well. As explained previously, the school identified overage students and helped them to enroll in E2020 to complete coursework and receive either a diploma or a GED.

B. Implement strategies to provide increased learning time.

As summarized previously, the school provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in after-school tutoring. The school day was not extended, but steps were taken to strongly promote and monitor bell-to-bell teaching. Observations showed that while bell-to-bell teaching improved, it was not consistently implemented.

TIG Strategy 10. Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.

As described previously, many activities were put into place to increase family and community engagement. While the yield was relatively small, parent engagement rates were higher than in the past several years, and parents reported that they found the activities informative and useful.

COMPARISON OF 2013 AND 2014 INSTRUCTIONAL AND INSTRUCTION SUPPORT PRACTICES

This section provides a description of the differences from spring 2013 to spring 2014 in ACHS' instructional practices and support for instruction. The comparison is based on findings from the 2013 instructional audit compared to brief classroom observations and interviews conducted in April 2013.

RMC Research staff observed instruction in 34 classrooms, representing about one third of the teachers in the school. The classrooms were randomly selected, with greater weighting on classrooms where core content (English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) was being taught. Only classrooms with permanent staff were included: no substitute teachers or classrooms with guest speakers were included in the sample. In 2013, all teachers were observed so the comparison is not precise, and is more representative of the core content teachers than all teachers.

CHANGES IN INSTRUCTIONAL RATINGS FROM 2013 TO 2014

Exhibit 2 shows the changes in ratings from 2013 to 2014 on instructional indicators. Ratings on four of the 19 indicators increased and show the impact of the professional learning approaches in the building:

- **Lesson objectives/learning goals.** Teachers were more likely to post and refer to lesson objectives and to help students understand specific learning goals. This year, nearly all of the teachers posted goals and about half referred to them during the portion of the lesson that was observed.
- **Classroom management.** More staff in 2014 than 2013 were proficient at classroom management, though management remains a concern in more than a third of the classrooms observed. Well-managed classrooms featured students who were on task and engaged in the learning. There were several teachers who were rated “exemplary” in this category, providing highly engaging lessons, involving all of the students, and quickly bringing any student who was off task into the classroom activities being implemented. However, several teachers, particularly new teachers, struggled with classroom management. In their classrooms, students were listening to music, texting on their cell phones, and sometimes actively disrupting the class by making jokes or inappropriate comments, eating, throwing things, having side conversations, or sleeping. While some of the teachers made attempts to get the students to become more attentive, many teachers ignored the behaviors and simply taught to those who were listening.

This is an area of high concern for some teachers. It is likely that their challenges with management are connected both with the way they convey and reinforce expectations and because they have not provided instruction that is engaging enough to interest the students. It is also clear that by late April, if management is a concern, it is not likely to be repaired. Norms that are established in classrooms during the first few weeks are hard to change.

EXHIBIT 2. COMPARISON OF 2013 AND 2014 RATINGS ON INSTRUCTION INDICATORS

Instruction	2013 Rating	2014 Rating
1. Instructional staff know and understand the content of the subject taught.	Proficient	Proficient
2. Instructional staff communicate lesson objectives to students to help them understand specific learning goals and expectations for demonstrating proficiency.	Partially Proficient	Proficient
3. Instructional staff communicate clearly and accurately in the learning environment.	Proficient	Proficient
4. Instructional staff use effective classroom management strategies.	Minimally Proficient	Partially Proficient
5. Instructional staff create a culturally responsive learning community in the classroom.	Minimally Proficient	Minimally Proficient
6. Instructional staff routinely implement elements of differentiated instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.	Partially Proficient	Minimally Proficient
7. Instructional staff have high expectations for student learning.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
8. Instructional staff provide instruction designed to help students apply their learning outside the classroom (relevant instruction).	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
9. Instructional staff teach to the Common Core.*	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
10. Instructional staff promote college and career readiness.*	Minimally Proficient	Minimally Proficient
11. Instructional staff teach at the appropriate level of cognitive demand.*	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
12. Instructional staff employ instructional strategies for English language learners.*	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
13. Instructional staff ask students to take multiple perspectives.*	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
14. Instructional staff provide assistance, intervention and enrichment to supplement general classroom instruction to support the learning of all students.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
15. Instructional staff engage in horizontal articulation within grade/subject configurations.	Partially Proficient	Approaching Proficient
16. Instructional staff administer a variety of formative assessments aligned to standards.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
17. Instructional staff provide timely and specific feedback to students on an ongoing basis and help students use feedback to improve their performance.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
18. Instructional staff use summative and benchmark assessments to guide instruction and reteaching.	Partially Proficient	Minimally Proficient
19. Instructional staff promote a school culture characterized by collegiality and shared responsibility for student learning.	Partially Proficient	Approaching Proficient

*These indicators were embedded in other indicators last year and are now separated out.

- **Horizontal articulation.** Classroom observations showed evidence of stronger horizontal articulation this year. Some of the teachers were implementing common lessons, many of which were highly engaging and well-paced. Most of the observed teachers from the same grade levels and content areas were addressing the same standards.
- **Staff collegiality and shared responsibility.** Positive strides have been made in staff collegiality. Department chairs have been given more direction for their PLCs and most reported that they work hard to facilitate collaborative opportunities to discuss instruction, how to weave writing into their lesson plans, implementing skills acquired during professional learning sessions, and developing common assessments. While success varies by department, there has been a noticeable positive change in this area, with teachers being very willing to engage in collaborative planning and to take on more responsibility for student performance. However, shared responsibility is still somewhat of a challenge since teachers still tend to take singular ownership of the students they teach.

In addition, on the positive side, observers noted more:

- **Student discourse.** More of the assignments provided to students prompted them to engage in collaborative work.
- **Use of questioning strategies.** Students were also asked more questions than was the case last year and teachers were less likely to comment on answers until they had heard from several students.

The Exhibit also shows that ratings declined in two areas:

- **Differentiated instruction.** There was little evidence that any instruction was differentiated. Most of the observed teachers engaged in direct instruction, followed by provision of an activity that all students were assigned to complete. The pacing was the same for all students. When students were in collaborative groups, they tackled the same problems.
- **Use of summative data to guide instruction.** Teachers reported that they had reviewed the TCAP and ACT scores during one faculty meeting, but very few had time to revise their instruction based on the results. They did not recall taking a deep dive into the data to discuss the skills that students had not acquired, but rather remember the big picture of student needs.
- **No Change: additional instructional challenges.** The Exhibit also shows areas of instructional challenge where there has been little or no change. It should be noted that there are clear exceptions among staff for each of these indicators, but the trend across all staff indicates only partial proficiency.
- **Implementing culturally responsive instruction.** Too few teachers are providing culturally responsive instruction and instruction targeted for English language learners, even though that was added as a focus for professional development.
- **Teaching to the Common Core and at appropriate levels of cognitive demand.** Teaching to the Common Core and to the appropriate level of cognitive demand are still problematic. While

there is more attention to nonfiction and analysis, students are not yet being asked to take multiple perspectives in all classes; they are not asked to apply their learning outside of the classroom. Some of the instruction was aimed at a very low level of understanding, and many of the questions prompted students to summarize rather than to analyze, critique, synthesize, or otherwise engage in sufficient depths of knowledge. Teachers also pointed out that the curricular resources provided by the district are not well aligned to the Common Core and that they do not have enough time to revise all of the resources. Many believe that the district should improve the pacing guide and other tools provided to teachers.

- **Using formative assessments and providing timely and constructive feedback.** The observations also showed that, while improvement was shown, too few teachers are using formative assessments and providing students with useful feedback. Students confirmed these findings, reporting that when they do not understand material, teachers do not consistently offer explanations to help them. They are told to attend after-school tutoring, but many of the students work after school or take care of siblings, and are not able to come to the tutoring sessions. Some students reported that teachers rarely give them constructive feedback other than to tell them whether they are right or wrong or to give them a grade on their papers. There were exceptions: students said that they receive much more feedback on their writing than they had received in the past.
- **Employing classroom interventions/assistance.** Students, particularly those in their junior and senior years, are not provided with enough intervention to remediate or accelerate their learning inside the classroom. As previously mentioned, teachers refer students to after-school tutoring and some teachers ask proficient or advanced students to help others. However, most of the time, teachers will provide quick feedback during independent practice, but teachers report that they have little time to provide differentiated interventions or acceleration given the demands already placed on their time.
- **High expectations for student performance.** Instruction does not consistently reflect high expectations for student performance. Many teachers are willing to accept incomplete answers or partially correct answers from students without probing thinking or using approximations to help the students self-correct. Some teachers still hold the belief that many of the students at the high school are not college material and should not be “forced” to engage in rigorous coursework. Some give relatively high grades for poor performance and reported that they were asked not to fail students so they give them a C even though they are failing. This issue needs attention at the school since the research is clear that students often rise to the level of expectations put forth by their teachers, as long as they receive sufficient guidance and support for learning.
- **Helping students become college and career ready.** ACHS’ staff have a variety of opinions about their role in helping students to become college and career ready. Many believe that there should be a greater emphasis on career pathways in the building. They point to the success of the Health Sciences Academy and to the dual enrollment options available to students, and state that they think all students should select a career pathway. Others believe that all students should be college ready. While some teachers have college banners or other college-related materials in their classrooms, but most do not. Some teachers, particularly those teaching Advanced Placement courses, discuss the need to acquire specific types of study skills or reach particular skill levels to pass tests, but most do not. Rather, most of the college-readiness

strategies are left to the counselors. The counselors provide assistance with research on colleges, scholarship and student loan applications, and essays (which could be part of English assignments instead). The counselors also arrange the college field trips. Students reported that they would like to have many more options for career pathways and to be better prepared for college.

CHANGES IN SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING RATINGS FROM 2013 TO 2014

Exhibit 3 shows the changes in ratings from 2013 to 2014 on support for teaching and learning indicators. Data for these ratings came from document analysis and interviews/focus groups.

EXHIBIT 3. COMPARISON OF 2013 AND 2014 RATINGS ON SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING INDICATORS

Support for Teaching and Learning	2013 Rating	2014 Rating
1. School leadership develops and communicates a clear shared vision and mission.	Partially Proficient	Approaching Exemplary
2. School leadership focuses the entire school community on school improvement.	Partially Proficient	Exemplary
3. School leadership focuses on improving and supporting effective instruction.	Partially Proficient	Proficient
4. School leadership systematically monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
5. School leadership allocates the resources necessary to increase student achievement.	Approaching Proficient	Approaching Exemplary
6. School leadership ensures the effective use of instructional time.	Partially Proficient	Approaching Proficient
7. School leadership ensures that all professional development is focused on improving student achievement.	Partially Proficient	Exemplary
8. The school leadership team, teachers, and other instructional staff actively engage families as partners in the school and classrooms.	Partially Proficient	Partially Proficient
9. Administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff provide parents with easy and regular access to information about the school and their children's achievement and provide suggestions for how to help their children increase their achievement.	Partially Proficient	Approaching Proficient

Ratings on seven of the nine indicators increased and show the impact of the professional learning approaches in the building:

- Clear shared vision and mission.** The administrators, led by the principal, developed and communicated a strong vision for instructional effectiveness and student performance in the building. A new mission was crafted, along with a new motto. The vision and mission were conveyed in multiple ways: in faculty meetings, rallies, assemblies, newsletters, and on signs, announcements, and emblazoned on shirts and other clothing. Students and staff knew and felt the changes in the building and most had very positive feelings about the school at the beginning of the year. As previously mentioned, some of the momentum was lost toward the end of the year as some staff withdrew and no longer believed in the shared vision due to school culture issues described above.

- **Focus on school improvement.** All stakeholders reported that there was no doubt about the focus in the school. Everyone was focused on improving instruction, school culture and climate, student achievement and graduation rate, and parent engagement.
- **Focus on improving and supporting effective instruction.** This year, there was a huge emphasis on professional learning and improved instruction. The new emphasis on writing, constructing meaning, lesson planning, and content instruction was clearly understood by all administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff. Support for instruction came in the form of coaching. However, while the focus was there, the yield was uneven. There were clear signs that teachers adopted the required approaches, but instruction in the building is not effective enough and still requires focused support and accelerated improvement if goals are to be reached.
- **Resource allocation.** ACHS received a significant infusion of funds from the TIG, as described previously. Funds were used to hire an additional administrator, deliver professional learning opportunities for teachers, sponsor speeches by nationally known researchers, provide a stipend for teachers to offer tutoring, pay for multiple TOSAs to assume roles and responsibilities for coaching, data analysis and provision, and parent and community engagement. Resource allocation was aligned to the UIP and TIG. The question raised by some respondents, though, is whether the cost of some of the contractors was worth it. For example, the speech by Dr. Schmoker was very well received, but some thought the cost was too high. Similarly, budget allocated to Ellen Levy was questioned, since some thought the sessions lacked depth and customization to school needs. Many staff question the amount of funds rumored to be allocated to Dr. Marzano. While they believe his approach may be the right one for them to adopt, they wonder whether they can find supplemental onsite support that is less expensive. Some suggest that funds would be better spent on having experts (but not national experts) helping them with coaching and other forms of onsite technical assistance or new programs such as career pathways or stronger interventions for juniors and seniors though others believe that the current plan is the best one. Regardless of their feeling about funding, nearly all staff recognize the need for further and more in-depth professional development so that they can improve their instruction.

In addition, staff recognized and were very appreciative of the fact that school administrators did not waste their time. Faculty meetings were often dismissed early when information was disseminated and no more time was needed. Teachers and other staff used the extra time for lesson planning and collaboration.

- **Use of instructional time.** As described previously, steps were taken to ensure bell-to-bell teaching, for appropriate lesson planning, and to use more time for student discourse. The actual efficient and effective use of instructional time varied by teacher but was improved from last year.
- **Professional development focused on student achievement.** As previously discussed, all professional learning opportunities were focused on improving instruction and increasing student academic performance.
- **Parent access to information.** Through the improved website, postcards from teachers, robo-calls for failing or at-risk students, the newsletter and other outreach activities described

previously, the school implemented many strategies to provide parents with access to information. During parent walks, parents could view instruction in the school. The strategy fell short in the area of providing parents with information on how to help their children increase their achievement in specific content areas.

Ratings remained the same in two areas:

- 1. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.** Administrators were in classrooms much more often this year than last year and more often provided feedback to staff on their instruction. However, based on observations, much more is needed in this area since instruction is not yet at the level necessary to help students accelerate their improvement in all content areas.
- 2. Family engagement.** Again, as previously summarized, the school implemented many strategies to increase parent/guardian and community member participation in the school. The yield was small but better than participation rates from last year. However, the school needs to find more effective ways to engage more parents/guardians.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE

The 2013 report identified many challenges associated with school climate. Average ratings on the APS school climate survey were relatively low and staff reported being discouraged, frustrated, and divided. Many changes were made this year that resulted in positive changes in climate, but as described above, there are still some school climate issues to be resolved.

Changes in climate reflected in the school climate survey. The APS survey was administered in February 2014 and shows a number of positive changes in licensed staff ratings of school climate. Overall ratings indicate that about half to two thirds of staff have positive views of school climate. The survey results showed that many ratings improved from last year. Areas where agreement was higher among at least 10% of staff were, in order of magnitude of change:

- Decisions at my school are based on the best interests of students;
- I feel appreciated for the work I do;
- There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between building administrators and staff in our building;
- My principal/supervisor has a clear understanding of the challenges I face in my job;
- I am able to influence the decisions made by my school/site;
- I experience a spirit of teamwork and cooperation at my site;
- I am trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction;
- Employees in this building are empowered to help solve problems;
- Building administrators share the information I need to perform my job;
- Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions;
- I believe decisions made at my school are based on student data and information;
- I am given opportunities to influence the decisions that are made by my school site;
- I believe the music programs are supported by my building; and
- Building professional development has provided me with strategies that I have incorporated into my instructional delivery methods.

Areas where disagreement increased by more than 10% of staff were, in order of magnitude:

- Teachers and staff work in a school environment that is clean and well-maintained;
- I understand the long-term vision of Aurora Public Schools; and
- I have sufficient access to instructional technology.

Most of the current issues with school climate, discussed in the previous section, have to do with conflict among administrative staff, transparency, fear of dismissal, and most importantly, issues with school discipline and student absenteeism. In addition, respondents raised the following issues:

- **Police vehicles parked at the front of the school.** Many respondents felt that having police vehicles at the front of the school sent negative messages about the school to the students and the community. They were concerned that people would perceive the school as unsafe.
- **Displays of disrespect of some students for teachers.** Several respondents noted that there have been increases in racial slurs toward adults in the school. Several adults feel that there are no consequences for students who call teachers and other staff names or who mock adults.
- **Unrestricted access to the building.** Students are perceived to have relatively unrestricted access to the school and are still prone to gather in restrooms and destroying property there. There have been reports of drugs being sold in the restrooms. While access to the front door is limited, students are said to come and go from other doors with impunity.
- **Hall monitor behavior.** The behavior of hall monitors continues to be problematic for both students and adults in the building. Many respondents reported that hall monitors tend to spend a lot of time talking with each other rather than patrolling the halls. Respondents reported that the monitors do not consistently follow through in escorting students to classes or to detention. Some hall monitors were reportedly verbally abusive to students and some were accused of being physically abusive by grabbing students' arms or shoulders.
- **Cell phone and iPod usage.** While the school appears to have strict rules on cell phone and iPod/music device use, the rules are not well-enforced. Students are allowed to use cell phones and music devices when not in class. This decision was made to provide some concessions to students and allow them more ownership in their schooling. However, cell phones and music devices are not to be used in classrooms unless they are for instruction or if a student has successfully completed all his/her work. Students were observed using cell phones for non-instructional purposes or listening to music during instruction in more than three fourths of the classes observed. Teachers say that because others are inconsistent, they have a hard time reinforcing rules in their classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides conclusions about ACHS' fidelity to the UIP and the TIG, and changes in ratings from last year's instructional audit findings. A set of recommendations for addressing remaining large challenges is provided.

SUMMARY OF FIDELITY TO UIP

Fidelity to the UIP was very high. ACHS has implemented nearly all of the activities that were outlined in the school's UIP. A few were deferred or dropped; other activities were added. Impacts, however, were mixed. The four areas in which activities were categorized and their impacts are:

- 1. Curriculum and Instruction.** Focused professional development was provided and had positive results that included:
 - Increased teacher knowledge and implementation of effective instructional strategies for writing across the content areas;
 - Increased teacher understanding and communication of lesson plan objectives;
 - Increased teacher knowledge and implementation of strategies related to the Madeline Hunter approach to lesson delivery;
 - Increased coaching resulting in more engaging instruction and rigor for some teachers;
 - Increased collaboration of teachers in the same department; and
 - Establishment of academic goals for every classroom.

Strategies connected with data provision and analysis were not as effective, with too few teachers understanding how to interpret data and too few using results to improve their instruction.

- 2. Equity and Engagement.** Multiple activities were held in this area, with mixed results. Activities included:
 - Improving the physical appearance of the school, creating a new mission and motto, making daily announcements, holding a pep rally, and sponsoring more student clubs and programs that led to improved appearance and better student attachment and pride in the school; and
 - Cessation of pep rallies and other spirit-related activities for students, and challenges associated with the "tardy sweeps" (discussed next) which led to suspicion, uneven enforcement of policies and consequences for missing classes, and decreased student attachment and pride in the school.
- 3. Communication and Accountability.** Many activities were implemented in this domain, again with mixed and sometimes clearly unintentional results.

- EWIs were hired to work with failing and at-risk ninth- and tenth-grade students. Students reported that the EWIs were helpful but some questioned whether the cost per student was worth the benefit since so few students were served;
 - Counseling was devoted to grade levels; administrators met with at-risk students, after-school and Saturday tutoring was provided, all of which were well-received and helped students with credit accrual and increasing their motivation to learn;
 - Round up of displaced students and super seniors, to help them enroll in E2020 and other activities focused on credit accrual and school completion. This activity led to 55 students being graduated midyear with either a high school diploma or a GED.
 - The tardy sweeps/accountability walks changed the perceived locus of control in the school, from a sense of chaos and student control, to a sense of orderliness and adult control. However, some actions associated with the strategy were perceived as punitive and intended to promote student dropout or absenteeism since the consequences for being late by just a few minutes were so high. A parent complained and the district asked the school to change the policy. A new (similar) strategy (accountability walks) was implemented. The new strategy was not implemented with as much fidelity, and consequences for students were not consistent. The new policy was not as effective in reducing tardiness and was still considered by many of the students and their parents to be overly punitive.
 - Communication with parents/guardians about student achievement was increased through school newsletters, an improved website, teacher postcards, and robo-calls to parents of failing students.
 - Rewards for positive behaviors included an ice cream social for students whose attendance was above 90%. Some students wished there were more rewards for student achievement.
- 4. Campus and Community.** Many activities were implemented to connect parents and community partners to the school, which resulted in low but better participation by parents than had been the case in the past. Activities included:
- Parenting matters programs that sponsored educational events; parent coffees and other gatherings; parent classes; parent learning walks where parents observed classrooms and provided feedback; and classes for parents on cooking and English as a second language.
 - The website was improved to make it more attractive and accessible, and community breakfasts were held to engage community partners.

SUMMARY OF FIDELITY TO THE TIG

Fidelity to the TIG was very high. Nearly all of the activities identified in the TIG were implemented as planned. However, as is the case with the UIP, the activities resulted in mixed impacts.

Transformation model. A new, highly experienced principal was hired and established a new mission and vision for school transformation. Three new assistant principals were hired. For the first semester,

great momentum was developed and bold initiatives were instituted, in the areas of professional learning, student engagement, graduation rate, and parent involvement, as described above. However, over the course of the year, rifts developed among the assistant principals which caused a slowing of momentum and some instability among staff. Some of the climate issues that arose around questioning motives, transparency, and fear for one's job are typical of the transformation model, especially since some staff were asked to leave based on ineffective performance. Other issues were more unique to the school and its leadership team, and require attention.

Operational flexibility. The principal was given operational flexibility by the district and implemented the flexibility by creating an infrastructure for support and increased time for professional development and after-school programming.

Support from the LEA. Ongoing support was provided by the LEA.

Teacher evaluation system. The system was piloted this year but was received with mixed reviews.

Reward school staff who increase achievement and support or remove those who are not effective. Staff were unsure about rewards, but all respondents were clear that those who were ineffective would be supported and, as needed, dismissed.

Recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of students in a turnaround school. Three administrators and 34 teachers were hired this year. Some will be retained and others will not.

Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based, aligned to state content standards, and vertically aligned. All of the changes to the instructional program made this year were research-based and aligned to state content standards.

Use data to inform and differentiate instruction. ACHS did not provide sufficient access to data or sufficient instruction to teachers to enable them to analyze data well and use data to differentiate instruction. There is little differentiated instruction in evidence in the school.

Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time. The school provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in after-school and Saturday instruction, but only about 25 to 30 students per day did so. Leadership also emphasized bell-to-bell instruction, with mixed results.

Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement. As summarized previously, many activities were put into place to increase family and community engagement. Participation rates were low but better than in the past.

DIFFERENCES IN INSTRUCTIONAL AUDIT RATINGS: INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT PRACTICES

Classroom observations and information from interviews and focus groups were used to provide a snapshot of differences in instructional practices and support from 2013 to 2014. Changes in ratings of instruction included:

- Increases in posting and referring to lesson objectives/learning goals; somewhat better classroom management (though this was a still a concern in multiple classrooms); horizontal articulation; staff collegiality and shared responsibility; student discourse; and use of classroom questioning strategies.
- Decreases in differentiated instruction; and use of summative data to guide instruction; and
- No change and continued “partial proficiency” in implementing culturally responsive instruction; teaching to the Common Core and at appropriate levels of cognitive demand; using formative assessments and providing timely and constructive feedback; employing effective interventions and assistance within the classroom; high expectations for student performance; and helping students to become college and career ready.

Changes in ratings of support for teaching and learning were more positive, with increased ratings on seven of the nine indicators. Changes in ratings included:

- Increases in creating and implementing a clear shared vision and mission; focusing on school improvement; focusing on improving and supporting effective instruction; implementing effective resource allocation; monitoring the use of instructional time; implementing professional development focused on student achievement; and providing more parent access to information; and
- Ratings remained the same in two areas: monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction and family engagement, with both areas showing more activity but limited impact.

Changes in school climate as measured by the district survey were also provided, with mostly positive results indicating an improved school climate. A few remaining challenges, such as cell phone usage and hall monitor behavior, were also discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Address the student absenteeism issue.** Root causes of student absenteeism often focus on a lack of perceived value of education, a lack of academically engaging instruction, a lack of differentiated instruction such that the pacing is too fast or too slow; ineffective learning supports and interventions; a poor interpersonal relationship with teachers, administrators, or staff; and too little autonomy and ability to express oneself in unique ways. The school should study the likely reasons for absenteeism by conducting focus groups with students and reviewing the research literature; should investigate strategies that have been effective at other high schools with characteristics similar to ACHS; and plan an initiative to increase student attendance.
2. **Implement an improved strategy for reducing truancy and addressing discipline.** The accountability walks have met with partial success and signals have been sent about the need to get to class on time. However, the policy had unintentional outcomes. Consider instead piloting or using a restorative justice technique. This approach has been effective at Hinkley High School. If this approach is attractive and the school decides to experiment with it, a good first step is to

constitute a student and teacher advisory group or taskforce. Have the group gather input from students and co-design the process within parameters specified by leadership.

3. **Focus professional learning on instruction and accelerate progress.** The foci from 2013-2014 had a good yield and all of the practices that were promoted should be retained and monitored for implementation. This year, put a focus on implementing highly engaging content instruction completely aligned to the Common Core. Help teachers to learn about Marzano's *Art and Science of Teaching*, *Uncommon Schools*, or other pedagogies that have high effect sizes. Provide videotapes and other means for teachers to view models of effective teaching and critique themselves and one another in a safe environment for feedback. Employ more instructional coaching to improve practice. Monitor for implementation. Teachers should learn and utilize "no opt out" and other techniques.
4. **Help teachers learn how to use data for instructional improvement.** Every teacher should be using formative assessment on a frequent and routine basis so they can check for understanding and mastery and reteach as needed. Help them to gain easy access to data that can be analyzed all the way down to the misconception level. Assist them with the analysis until they become adept enough to analyze data on their own.
5. **Provide better after-school interventions for students.** Consider adding more effective computer-assisted instruction to the suite of interventions available for students. Add more access to highly-effective programming for English language learning to students who are not fluent in English. Add skills-based programming in other content areas.
6. **Encourage all adults in the building to know and greet the students by name.** Every adult in the building should make an effort to call students by name, greet them when they see them, and establish a positive relationship. Consider asking every adult in the building to identify several students that he/she mentors. It is important to get to know the students and their concerns. Every adult should take an hour a week to meet with mentees and establish mutually beneficial relationships.
7. **Have more events targeted to school pride and attachment.** Constitute a student leadership group to help, and hold more routine pep rallies, school spirit events, and recognition of students who succeed in academics, athletics, the arts, and other areas. Ask staff to attend events more often and support the students. Involve students in more decision making and help them to take ownership in the appearance of the school and planning school events.
8. **Establish more career pathways.** Consider as a long-term initiative administering Work Keys or another assessment to all ninth-grade students and to help them formulate a personal learning plan that takes them at least through 2 years beyond high school. To the extent possible, provide more career pathways for students. Expand the health sciences program and add other areas of interest, such as technology, robotics, or engineering; environmental science and agriculture; communications or other areas that can be supported by local corporations with internships and coursework.
9. **Continue efforts to engage parents/guardians.** Conduct a needs assessment to understand the topics of most concern to parents and then make plans to meet their needs. Provide them with

information that shows the value of education, the jobs their students can acquire, and career pathways.

- 10. Attend to some of the “little” things.** A number of small issues were identified in this report that served to undermine the positive change going on. Take care of some of the little issues to send the message that everyone is listening and cares. Move the police car into the parking lot rather than parking it at the front of the building. Ensure monitors do not congregate and talk only with each other rather than the students. Have students make some of the announcements. Monitor the Gaudy goals to ensure they reflect high expectations. Repair the bathrooms. Correct the misspellings on the signs. Serve ethnically appealing foods at parent events. Notice small improvements and recognize them.