ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Small Learning Communities Program Evaluation

Rio Grande High School 2002-2003

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Small Learning Communities Program Evaluation Report
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Executive Summary

Rio Grande High School was partially successful at implementing small learning communities (SLC) in the 2002-2003 school year. The freshman academy embodied key SLC design features, engendered staff support and produced measurable results within its first year of operation. At the upper grade levels, efforts to create small learning communities were less successful, however staff developed detailed plans for enacting SLC career pathway reforms in the 2003-2004 school year.

Key freshman academy outcomes were:

- Improved climate of school safety, peer relations, academic self-confidence and academic rigor compared to the previous school year.
- Improved academic grades, course passing rates and proportion of students passing to the next grade level compared to the previous school year.
- Increased test scores, securing Rio Grande's release from State probationary status. Freshman academy students scored an average of 9 median percentile points higher than non-academy freshmen did in 2001-02.
- Decrease in the proportion of ninth graders leaving school, from 4.9% to 0.6%.

Factors that facilitated freshman academy successes included the following:

- The freshman academy was separated, physically and functionally, from the upper grade levels.
- Scheduling permitted frequent team meetings and teacher collaboration.
- 80 to 90 percent of students on each team were shared by all four teachers on the team.
- The freshman academy's principal had a detailed, incremental and long-range plan for reform and provided strong leadership.
- District leadership committed funds to reduce Rio Grande's teacher-pupil ratio to 1:90, permitting smaller class sizes.

RDA recommends the following actions at Rio Grande High School in light of its return to one-principal leadership in 2004-05:

- Continue the freshman academy in its 2003-04 form.
- Develop authentic SLCs in the upper grade levels.
- Provide one administrative and instructional leader for each SLC.
- Implement student and teacher teams at all grade levels.
- Clarify and enforce policies related to attendance and discipline, and establish buy-in among teachers for their role in managing attendance and discipline.
- Conduct follow-up evaluations to identify changes in student attitudes, school climate and student performance as a result of continued reforms or changes in school structures and strategies.

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Introduction

A Small Learning Community (SLC) is a separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Groups of students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes. Common preparatory periods allow teachers to collaborate, learn from and support each other and provide students with integrated, interdisciplinary learning experiences. Some SLC's have a career focus and/or teacher-student advisory relationships. The literature on SLC's defines the following ingredients as crucial for success:

1. *Student and Teacher Teams:* Students and teachers are scheduled together in interdisciplinary teams.
2. *Teacher Collaboration and Integrated Curricula:* Teachers meet regularly to discuss students and plan integrated curricula during common preparatory periods.
3. *Separate Space:* SLC staff and students share a common space, separate from the rest of the school.
4. *Distinctive Thematic or Curricular Focus:* Each SLC has a distinctive thematic or curricular focus.
5. *Autonomy and Flexibility:* Each SLC has autonomy and the flexibility to adjust scheduling, curricula, budget, personnel, and other operational factors.

Between October 1, 2000 and September 30, 2003, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) received funding from the U.S. Department of Education to implement small learning community programs in six high schools. RGHS was one of the schools awarded funds through APS' federal SLC grant. It started receiving SLC funds in the fall of 2000, but efforts to implement SLC's at Rio remained in planning and experimental stages until the 2002-03 school year. The reform initiative took off in November 2001 when the APS district leadership mandated conversion of Rio Grande High School to a Small Learning Communities (SLC) model, with three independent academies on the same campus. The district leadership's stated intent was to improve Rio Grande's dismal record of attendance, dropout, academic achievement, vandalism, violence and administrative turnover. The district provided a part-time administrator to help plan the school's conversion to three academies, a "redesign" framework (Appendix B), and a conversion deadline of August 2002.

Evaluation Purpose and Methods

In July 2001, APS' Research, Development and Accountability department launched a multi-site evaluation of the district's Small Learning Community program. The Small Learning Communities Program Evaluation studied 8 SLC initiatives at 5 APS high schools. It resulted in seven reports, one district-level report which describes cross-site patterns and results, and six program-level reports. This report focuses on the Rio Grande

High School Freshman Academy, while also describing lessons learned from attempts to implement small learning communities at Rio's upper grade levels.

The purpose of the SLC Program Evaluation was to describe schools' SLC reforms and outcomes as well as identify the factors that supported SLC success. At both the district and the school levels, administrators wanted information that would help them decide whether to expand the SLC approach. They also wanted to know the best strategies for achieving positive results.

The evaluation used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Table 1 lists methods employed at Rio Grande High School. Using multiple methods allowed evaluators to corroborate findings and validate conclusions. Throughout this document, bracketed codes are used to indicate data sources.

Table 1. Data Collection Methods Used to Evaluate SLC's at Rio Grande High School.

Method	Code	Purpose	Date
Program Logic Model	lm	Delineate actual program activities/strategies, anticipated outcomes & presumed mechanisms of change.	March 2003
Student Survey	ss	Identify student perspectives, attitudes & short-term outcomes. Assess school climate. Compare academy and non-academy 9th grade results.	May 2002 May 2003
Teacher Focus Group	tfg	Define level & nature of teaming/collaborative activities, instructional activities & school structures. Identify implementation facilitators & constraints and perceived student, teacher & school outcomes.	May 2003
Instructional Coach Interview	ic	Identify implementation facilitators & constraints and perceived student, teacher & school outcomes.	May 2003
Student Focus Groups	sfg	Define nature & level of SLC implementation from students' perspectives. Identify perceived outcomes.	May 2003
Principal Interviews	pi	Identify school's vision & goals for the SLC, district-level & school-level facilitators & constraints, perceived outcomes & benefits, sustainability issues and lessons learned.	March 2003 May 2003 June 2003
Student Records (Information Technology Services)	its	Compare SLC attendance, test scores and dropout rates to school goals & prior performance.	Fall 2001-Spring 2002 & Fall 2002 – Spring 2003
Document Review	dr	Define program structures and activities.	March 2003

Limitations

With only one year of academy implementation to study, this evaluation of Rio Grande's small learning communities is necessarily restricted. The evaluation would need several more years of implementation in order to draw conclusions of a summative nature.

The fact that Rio Grande High School delayed SLC implementation until the final year of the SLC grant allowed RDA to gather baseline student survey data in May of 2002 as well as "post-test" survey data in May of 2003. RDA compared pre-SLC freshman attitudes and school climate with SLC freshman attitudes and school climate. One limitation to these comparisons is that the two groups of 9th graders may have been intrinsically different. It is possible that these intrinsic differences were responsible for some of the evaluation's significant findings. It is also possible that differences between the two groups obscured real SLC effects.

Rio Grande High School SLC Program Implementation

This section will describe Small Learning Community (SLC) reforms implemented by Rio Grande High School (RGHS) during the 2002-2003 school year. A brief overview of SLC reforms accomplished by RGHS as a whole is followed by a more in-depth section describing the Freshman Academy. Appendix A provides a detailed review of what was implemented in each academy and how those accomplishments compared to the RGHS redesign framework and to the SLC model

Rio Grande High School intended to implement three separate small learning communities in the 2002-03 school year, a freshman academy and two 10^{th}-12^{th} grade academies. Each upper-grade academy was to have a distinguishing academic theme and all three academies were to have independent administrative structures, interdisciplinary teaching teams, and reduced teacher caseloads.

Interviews with school administrators, instructional coaches, teachers and students revealed that Rio Grande High School succeeded in implementing most SLC plans at the freshman level but not at the 10^{th}-12^{th} grade levels. Key SLC reforms accomplished by RGHS in 2002-2003 included:

- A freshman academy separated physically and functionally from the upper grade levels.
- Teacher teaming within the freshman academy, with common planning periods.
- Student teaming within the freshman academy.
- One principal for each academy, plus one campus-wide operations principal.
- Reduced pupil-teacher ratio and smaller class sizes at all grade levels.

At the upper-grade levels, this evaluation found the following deviations from planned SLC reforms:

- Limited separation (in identity, space, staffing, scheduling, & curriculum) between the two upper-level academies. Many teachers taught in both academies and many students took classes in both academies.
- No teacher or student teaming in the upper-level academies (with the exception of one business and marketing teacher team).
- Weekly common preparatory periods used for professional development and school-wide planning rather than for teacher collaboration.
- Sizeable differences between the 2 upper-level academies in student body demographics and prior academic achievement levels (see Appendix C).
- No teacher-advisories[1] (in any of the 3 academies).

Rio Grande High School administrators were aware of the school's deviations from planned SLC reforms. One principal reported that the school's leaders had no experience with creating multi-grade teams and that they were unsuccessful in their efforts to find guidance and expertise within the district. Another explained that scheduling problems at

[1] Teachers are responsible for providing support and mentoring to assigned students.

the beginning of the school year consumed administrators' attention, making it impossible to plan and manage significant reforms.

Mid-way through the 2002-03 school year, upper-academy administrators began planning career pathways that incorporated teacher collaboration and advisory strategies. Staff committees were formed to design the pathways. Teachers were surveyed in order to place them on appropriate teams, and they received professional development in interdisciplinary instruction, team building, standards-based instruction and peer observation. Still, a number of critical SLC ingredients were missing from the career pathways design.

- There were no "teams" in the sense of groups of teachers who share all the same students and groups of students who share all the same teachers.
- Students could take classes in more than one pathway and in more than one academy.
- The distinctiveness of each upper-level academy was blurred by providing one course catalog for both academies, as well as identical structures and procedures.

Two-thirds of students surveyed in May of 2003 said they liked the idea of organizing their high school studies around a career focus (66.5%). However, focus group discussions revealed that students were skeptical about the implementation of career pathways, as evidenced in the following exchange:

> "There are a lot of kids that are going to end up crossing pathways, just like they did crossing academies this year."
> "Yeah. I already know that my schedule is all over the place, in so many different pathways."
> "I'm in four different pathways" [sfg-ab]

By the end of 2002-03, the future of autonomous academies at Rio looked uncertain. As one Rio principal commented, "it's very easy to revert back to the way it used to be." In some ways, he said, it would be more economical to do so. Principals described innumerable challenges to creating three separate academies. They also reported conflicting priorities emanating from the district and the community: "The district is expecting us to have as much autonomy as possible with the three academies," one said, "but I don't think the autonomy is a big deal with the community." [pi-ao]

In the spring of 2004, the APS Superintendent abolished the 4-principal structure at Rio Grande High School, based on recommendations received from a community-school task force, as well as pressures from a very vocal parent sub-group. This meant an end to the three-academy concept at Rio Grande High School. By removing the freshman academy's principal, the decision also threatened the sustainability of authentic SLC-reforms at the freshman level.

Freshman Academy Program Implementation

Rio Grande High School's freshman academy implemented most of the five research-based components deemed crucial for SLC success. Students and teachers were scheduled into teams. Teachers met regularly to discuss students and plan integrated curricula during common preparatory periods. Academy staff and students shared a common space separate from the rest of the school. The academy had the distinctive focus of transitioning students from middle school to high school. Finally, the academy had a measure of autonomy in terms of scheduling, assessment, curriculum, budget and staffing. The freshman academy's implementation of each of these SLC components is detailed below.

Student and Teacher Teams

As seen in Table 2 below, Rio Grande's freshman academy was comprised of 483 first-time 9th graders, 37 teamed teachers, 1 principal, and 1 instructional coach. Special education students were integrated into each team and shared classes with regular education students.

The Freshman Academy assigned students to seven teams, or "casas," each with 65 to 82 students. Each team had teachers from four core content areas – English, Math, Science and Social Studies (1-semester) or Health (1-semester). One team hosted most of the honors classes and another team hosted the bilingual classes. Students were to take all their core content classes within their team. In practice, the academy came close to this goal. According to teachers, 80% - 90% of students on each 4-member team were shared by all 4 teachers [tfg, pi].

Table 2. RGHS Freshman Academy Program Features 2002 - 2003

Program Features	RGHS Freshman Academy
1st Year of Operation	2002-2003
Total Student Enrollment	483
Percent Total Enrollment	100% of all first-time freshmen
Student Selection	All and only first-time freshmen
# Teams	7 teams (1 Honors, 1 Bilingual)
# Teachers per Team	4 (English, Math, Science, Social Studies/Health) 9 on honors team & 6 on bilingual team
# Teachers	37 (on teams)
# Students per Team	65 - 82
Teacher Course Load	5 (4 in freshman academy & 1 outside academy)
# Common Prep Periods Per Day	1
SLC Administration, Instructional Leadership & Coordination	Principal (1 FTE) Instructional Coach (1 FTE)
Separate Space	Yes (all core classrooms but science in academy buildings)
Special Education Inclusion	A, B, C levels

Teacher Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Activity

The Freshman Academy gave teachers common preparatory schedules by team and encouraged them to hold regular team meetings. Most teams held meetings once a week during block periods, using 45 to 110 minutes. Teachers used team meetings to discuss academic and behavioral concerns, meet with students, hold parent conferences and create Individual Education Plans for special education students. In addition to the four core team members, the head Special Education teacher and a team-assigned counselor periodically attended team meetings [tfg, pi].

Team meetings facilitated communication and problem-solving and served as a forum for ongoing, embedded professional development, as described in the following teacher comment:

> "During the team meetings a lot of ideas came out about how to correct problems, because a lot of the students who were difficult in my classes were difficult in other classes. We'd all try something different, and when someone found something that worked we'd all try it, and if it worked we'd keep going. So that was very helpful, passing information back and forth" [tfg].

Interdisciplinary instruction is a key feature of the small learning communities model, but one that can take multiple years to develop. As part of an incremental reform plan, Rio's freshman academy principal set minimal expectations for interdisciplinary instruction in the academy's first year: integration of a literacy theme across the four core disciplines and Physical Education. The academy supported this by focusing all staff development on literacy [pi]. Teachers reported that literacy permeated their instruction and was coordinated within their teams. In addition, the academy arranged one field trip per team related to post-secondary education and careers. A few teams went beyond these minimum requirements. One took students to the zoo as part of a science and math project. Another team did one interdisciplinary unit per semester that integrated all four subject areas [tfg].

Some students found even this minimal level of interdisciplinary activity to be helpful for understanding and integrating new subject matter. If they didn't understand a new concept in one class, students said they had a second chance to explore it in another class, from a different perspective and perhaps in a form that was more understandable to them. One student commented:

> "Say you're not getting something in Biology, then the teacher from Biology tells the Math teacher and he'll help you translate it into a different form, into a language that you understand" [sfg-c].

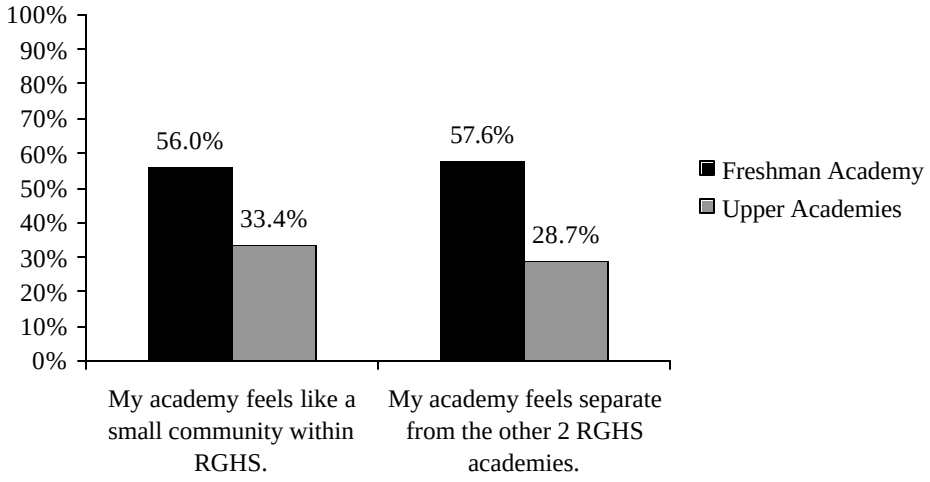
Separate Space

Academy administrators, including the principal, registrar, secretaries, counselors and instructional coach resided in academy buildings. Teachers reported that sharing a common space on campus allowed them to share information and resolve problems quickly.

> "Instead of having to go through the kid's schedule and find out who else had him, what is this teacher dealing with, you just go next door and ask somebody on my team: how are you getting along with so and so and are you having troubles."

Except for science classes, which took place in specially equipped classrooms located elsewhere on campus, students took all core content classes within freshman academy buildings. This helped develop a sense of separateness and community within the Freshman Academy. Over half of freshmen surveyed in May 2003 reported that the academy felt like a small community and felt separate from the larger school, compared to one-third or fewer of upper-academy respondents ($p < .001$).[2]. This kind of impact is encouraging for one year of implementation.

Figure 1. Percent Experiencing Sense of Community and Separateness: RGHS Freshman Academy Compared to Upper-Academy Student Survey Respondents.



Distinctive Thematic or Curricular Focus

Small learning communities research shows that SLC's need a distinctive thematic or curricular focus in order to develop a clear sense of identity and purpose. Rio Grande's freshman academy began with a clearly defined student population and an agenda distinct from the other two academies on campus. First, it enrolled all the school's freshmen and did not include students who were repeating the 9th grade. Secondly, its distinctive focus

[2] These questions were not included on the 2002 student survey so no comparisons can be made between 2003 SLC student perceptions and 2002 non-SLC student perceptions.

was to ease the transition from middle school to high school and prepare ninth graders for the upper grade curriculum.

Autonomy and Flexibility

For small learning communities to become full expressions of their distinctive educational philosophies, the literature shows that they need autonomy in the areas of budget, schedule, staffing, curriculum, leadership and governance, assessment and space. According to one educational researcher, "the greatest inhibitor to a small school's ability to realize its potential is lack of autonomy."[3] Autonomy maximizes the ability of a SLC to "personalize" education to meet the particular needs of its student body, and to make changes throughout the year as needed. Most small learning communities take multiple years to develop autonomy.[4]

The Freshman Academy exercised a measure of autonomy, but its budget, scheduling, staffing, curriculum and space were inextricably tied to those of the larger school and cluster. Supporting autonomy were the following:

- The academy had its own principal, counselors, teachers[5], and support staff, as well as its own Instructional Council comprised of teachers and parents.
- The freshman academy principal and instructional council planned the academy's professional development agenda and established academy-specific criteria and procedures for teacher evaluation.
- The academy had its own "master schedule" and behavioral management plan, and made their own decisions about 9th grade assessments, using both San Diego Quick and Assess 2 Learn to diagnose student competencies at the beginning of the school year [pi-c].
- The district supported autonomous academies by issuing separate report cards for each academy.

Constraints to autonomy included the following:

- The Operations Principal controlled the budget, which constricted academy autonomy both symbolically and functionally.
- The starting and ending times of each academy were tied to each other and to the cluster because buses had to adhere to a cluster schedule.
- Academies shared electives and teachers, which limited the sense of separateness.

[3] Mary Anne Raywid
[4] *The Learning Network* (2003), Small Schools Project, University of Washington College of Education, 4(2).
[5] Some teachers taught classes in the upper-level academies also.

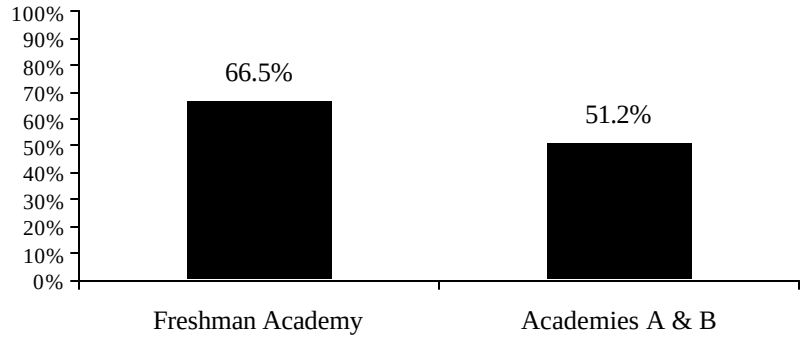
Freshman Academy Program Results

Freshman Academy results are presented in four sections. The first two sections describe students' and teachers' satisfaction with the Freshman Academy. Students provided their opinions about the Freshman Academy through a survey and a focus group, both administered in May 2003. Teacher opinions were gathered through a focus group and interview. The third section summarizes the academy's impacts on school climate and student attitudes. Results are drawn from two student surveys, two student focus groups, a teacher focus group and principal interviews. The fourth section outlines impacts on student performance, including attendance, test scores, grades, credits earned and drop-out. These results are analyses of data from the district's Student Information System.

Student Satisfaction

Two-thirds of freshman academy survey respondents expressed satisfaction with their academy. This was significantly higher than the percentage of upper-class respondents ($p < .001$).

Figure 2. Percent Students Expressing Satisfaction with Their Academy: Freshman Academy Compared to Academies A & B.



Freshmen reported that the academy helped them make a smooth transition from middle school to high school. They noted that teens mature a lot during their ninth grade year, and said they liked doing this as a separate group. Freshman also liked sharing classes with a team of students and teachers. One student expressed practical academic benefits:

> "It's better to have the groups, the *casas*, because say you're missing an assignment and you ask your friend for it, you know she'll have the same teacher." [sfg-c]

Some freshman students said that the separateness of the Freshman Academy made them feel excluded from the rest of the school, and they worried about how well they would make the transition into the upper grade levels. Upper-class students echoed this concern. [sfg-abc]

Teacher Satisfaction

Teachers were very pleased with the freshman academy. They appreciated the professional rewards of being able to work with students individually, as a result of having smaller classes and reduced caseloads. Many also liked being part of a team and sharing the same space on campus. These features were especially beneficial for the many first-time teachers and teachers new to Rio Grande High School [tfg].

Teachers expressed discomfort with the assignment of disciplinary management to teachers and teams. Some wanted the administration to play a more active role. As one freshman academy teacher said:

> "Discipline on the whole seems to be pretty much the way it's always been. But there shouldn't be that many discipline problems because with the lower class size, you have less. But when you do have a problem it's not being addressed by the administration. So the team takes on the role as punisher" [tfg].

Another teacher said that most freshman academy teachers felt very positively toward the reforms and were working hard to make them a success. As evidence, he reported that teachers regularly gave up lunchtime and prep time to accomplish academy-related tasks.

Student Attitudes and School Climate

Research has shown that school climate has a profound impact on student outcomes. When students feel safe, they can focus on learning, and they are more likely to take risks, admit errors, ask for help and experience failure along the way to higher levels of learning. Research also shows that when students feel supported by their peers and teachers they gain motivation and self-confidence. When students experience social support and high academic expectations simultaneously, they are more likely to make academic gains.[6] They are also less likely to drop out.[7]

Student survey and focus group results indicate that within the first year of SLC reform, the freshman academy improved school climate in a number of important ways. Compared to their ninth grade predecessors (2001-02), academy students felt safer, were more collaborative and supportive of their peers, experienced higher academic expectations, and had more academic self-confidence. Each of these gains is explained in detail below.

Other SLC goals were not fully realized in the first year of implementation. Freshman academy survey respondents did not feel more known or connected to adults at school compared to their non-SLC predecessors and compared to 2002-03 upper-class students. Nor did they report feeling more engaged in school. The climate of support for academic work among 9th graders also remained as low as it had been the previous year [ss].

Research has shown that reforms often take three to five years to yield measurable outcomes. The results of Rio's freshman academy in its first year are impressive in this context. Sustained SLC implementation may produce detectable improvements in students' sense of visibility, engagement, support for academic work and other aspects of school climate in future years.

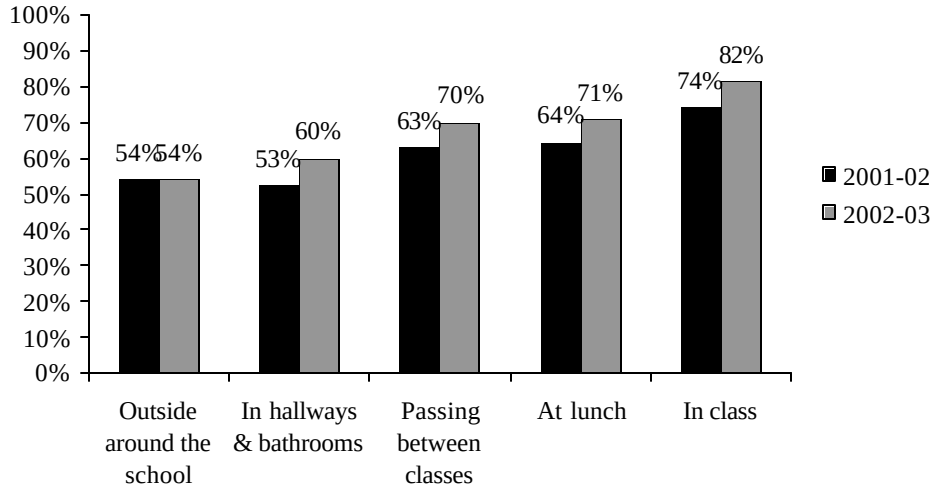
[6] Lee, VE, et.al. (1999) Social Support, Academic Press, and Student Achievement: A View from the Middle Grades in Chicago, p. 2.
[7] Darling-Hammond, L, et.al. (2002) Reinventing High School: Outcomes of the Coalition Campus Schools Project, *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(3), pp. 639-673.

Sense of Safety

Survey, interview and focus group findings suggest that freshman academy reforms, as well as school-wide security measures (suspensions and uniformed police patrols), increased ninth graders' sense of safety. Comparing student survey results from 2001-02 and 2002-03 showed the following:

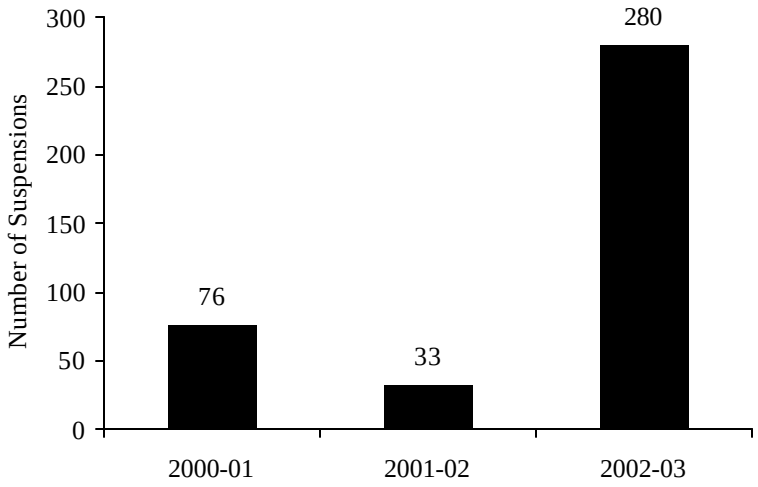
- Freshmen in 2002-2003 felt just as safe as upper-class students, while freshmen in 2001-2002 felt significantly less safe than their upper-class counterparts ($p < .01$).
- Academy students felt significantly safer than did ninth graders the previous school year ($p < .01$).
  - ✓ Students were consistently more likely to say they felt mostly or very safe in the hallways and bathrooms, passing between classes, in class and during lunch.
  - ✓ Students felt least safe outside around the school.

Figure 3. Percent 9th Graders Who Felt Mostly or Very Safe at RGHS: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



Principals described efforts to improve campus safety as one of the school's most significant initiatives. Campus security officers wore uniforms and patrolled the campus on bikes. One Student Success Advocate was assigned to handle long-term suspensions. According to principal interviews and school records, these efforts contributed to a surge of suspensions, from 33 in the 2001-02 school year, to 280 in 2002-2003. [8]

Figure 4. Number of Suspensions at Rio Grande High School by Year, All Grade Levels.



Teachers reported that assigning freshmen to a separate lunch period 3 days per week reduced the incidence of bullying by upper-class students. Principals, teachers and students reported less gang activity, fewer fights and an overall calmer atmosphere on campus. Teachers explained that, "They get caught faster, because the teachers know the students, they know they're missing, so the students get weeded out." Teachers also said that knowing students better helped them feel safer than in previous years [tfg].

Upper-class students agreed that reforms had improved security and school safety. For them, this was one of the reform's most valuable achievements.

> "Bringing [Rio] into academies gave it a little more organization, and did make it smaller, and that's why we had less fights…The organization and the fact that there were less fights was the best thing about reforming." [sfg-ab]

[8] It is possible that suspensions were not completely reported each year.

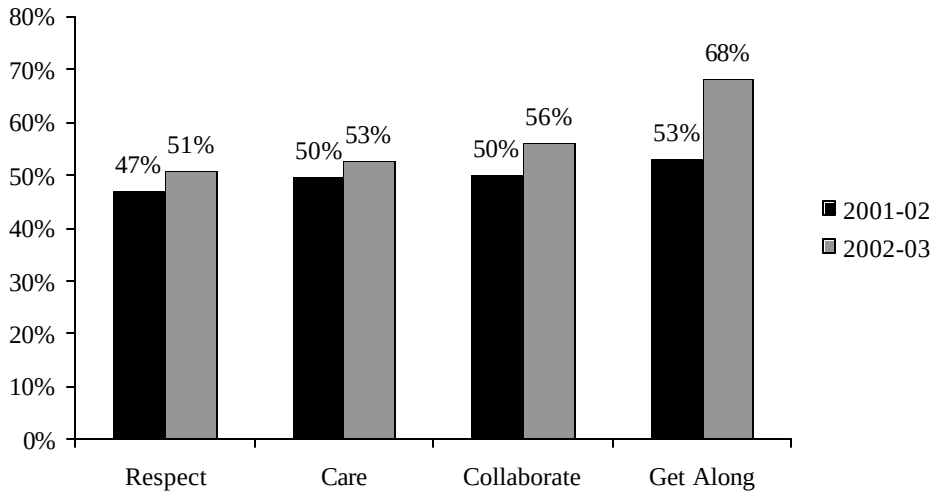
Peer Relations

Relations among peers are key to the overall climate of a school. Research shows that positive peer relations help motivate students to do well in school, build self-confidence and foster an atmosphere of psychological safety. Student survey results from 2001-02 (non-SLC) and 2002-03 (SLC) indicate that Rio Grande's freshman academy improved peer relations.

- Compared to their non-SLC ninth grade predecessors, freshman academy students felt better about how students treated each other at school ($p < .05$).

- Academy freshmen were more likely to agree that students treated each other with respect, cared about each other, collaborated to solve problems, and got along well together.

Figure 5. Percent 9th Graders Reporting Positive Peer Relations: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



Teachers explained that the small learning community approach and small class size fostered collaboration among students. One teacher commented:

> "When a student worked on a problem on the board, I saw more students correcting or helping than before. Before it would be like, who cares, that's their problem. Now it was like, I know how to do that. I think it was just this smaller group. They weren't intimidated" [tfg].

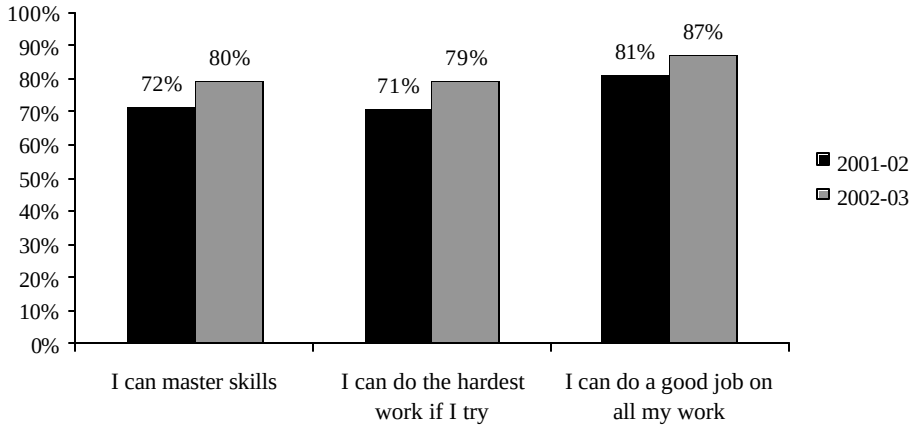
Academic Self-Confidence

High academic self-confidence has been associated with higher than average rates of four-year college attendance.[9] Student survey results from 2001-02 and 2002-03 suggest that the Freshman Academy increased students' sense of academic self-confidence.

- Academy students felt significantly more confident about their academic abilities compared to pre-academy 9th grade respondents ($p < .001$).

- Academy students were more likely than their predecessors to say they were certain they could master skills taught in their classes, do even the hardest work if they tried, and do a good job on all their class work if given enough time.

Figure 6. Percent 9th Graders Expressing Academic Self-Confidence: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



Teachers reported that the academy structure, with student teams and small class sizes, cultivated student self-confidence. Students got to know each other well and, in the safety of familiarity, felt freer to take risks and express themselves.

> "I think it frees up their sense of themselves. And they become more opinionated too, which is good, because most students are afraid to speak out and they're unsure of themselves and unsure whether or not they're saying the right thing. But we can tell that they're feeling very secure about themselves" [tfg].

Freshman-only classes also alleviated the intimidation many 9th graders experienced in mixed grade-level classes. Teachers said academy students participated more vigorously than 9th graders in past years. Small class sizes also made it impossible for students to shrink into the background. As one teacher commented, "There's nobody that could just sit and get away with being quiet anymore. Everybody is part of the group." [tfg].

[9] King, Jacqueline (1996). The Decision to Go to College: Attitudes and Experiences Associated with College Attendance Among Low-Income Students. The College Board.

High Academic Expectations and Support

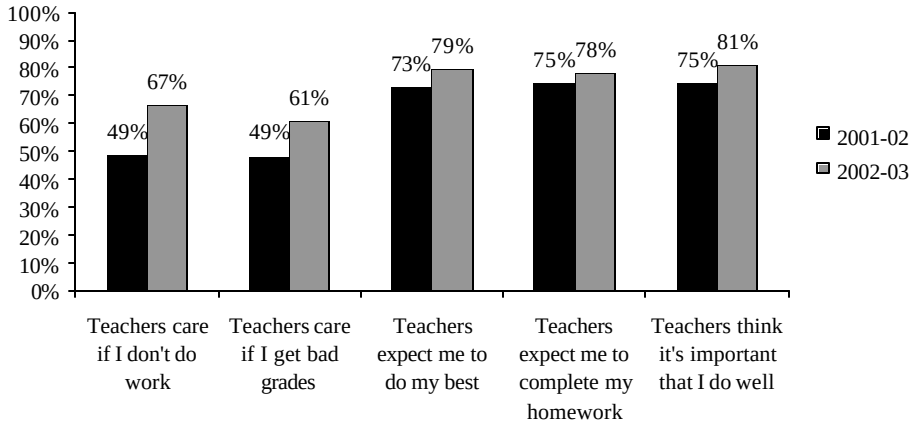
Recent evidence suggests that providing students with an environment of high academic expectations has a particularly strong impact on the academic achievement of students in low-income schools.[10] Results from two student surveys, teacher interviews and student focus groups indicate that Rio's freshman academy made some progress in increasing students' sense experience of high academic expectations, but more progress could be made. For example:

- Academy students were significantly more likely than 9th graders in 2001-02 to say that teachers cared if they didn't do their work and if they got bad grades ($p < .001$) [ss].

- The percentages of 9th grade academy respondents perceiving that teachers expected them to do their best all the time, complete their homework every night, and do well in school were slightly higher[11] than those from the previous year [ss].

- Freshman academy students reported that high school seemed easier than middle school. Many said they rarely had homework or if they did it might be only a couple times per week or only in select classes [sfg-c].

Figure 7. Percent 9th Graders Reporting High Academic Expectations: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



[10] Lee et al 1999.

[11] Differences were not statistically significant at $p < .05$ (t-test).

Freshman academy teachers said their reduced caseload and the less populated classes allowed them to spend more one-on-one time with each student. One teacher likened it to tutoring. Teachers said smaller classes permitted them to use more participatory instructional approaches, such as having students present assignments and coach each other. In the smaller environment, students were forced to participate.

> "You're able to work with the students on skills, one-on-one, check with each one to see if they understand the assignment or the subject and then follow them through to make sure they have a good grasp of the information." [tfg].

Student Visibility

Visibility is the degree to which each student is known and recognized for his or her efforts, talent, interests and personal circumstances. Visibility also reflects how much students are acknowledged and held accountable for their participation in school life. Small learning communities are designed to increase the visibility of individual students among peers and with teachers.

Teacher focus group findings indicate that academy teachers knew their students better than they had in previous years. They reported that the low pupil-teacher ratio allowed them to work with students individually, make sure students grasped new information, provide extra support where needed, and encourage students to participate in class. Team collaboration helped them keep track of students, understand students' needs and make appropriate referrals.

While Rio's freshman academy teachers reported an increase in activity to raise student visibility, student survey results suggest that freshman academy students did not feel any more visible than either upper-class students or ninth graders from the previous year. In particular, freshmen academy students did not feel well recognized for their efforts or well known for their talents and interests. Reductions in class size and teacher caseload at all grade levels may have created an even effect. Focus group findings support this interpretation, indicating that students at all grade levels felt well supported by their teachers. Students said most teachers worked hard to help them learn, often assisting students beyond regular school hours and during lunch.

> "The teachers really try to help you out this year. They try to make sure you get the word, make sure you understand everything." [sfg-c]

> "There's no teacher at Rio that's not willing to help any kid, like raise their grade or help them understand." [sfg-ab]

In summary, evaluation results suggest that Rio Grande High School as a whole may have enhanced teachers' knowledge and support of students by reducing the pupil-teacher ratio. However, there appears to be ample room for improving academy students' sense that they are recognized for their efforts, talents and personal interests.

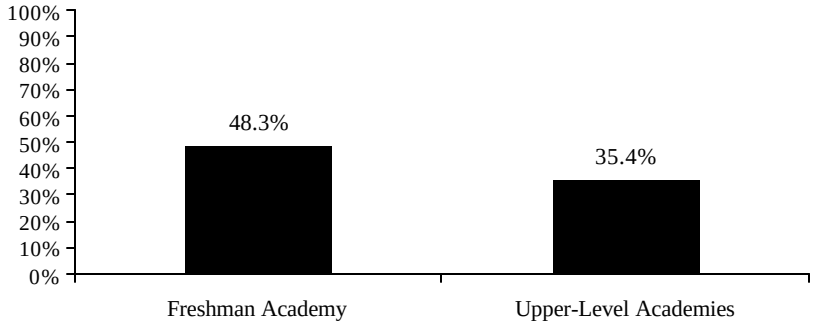
Parent Involvement

Parent engagement was one of the goals of Rio's small learning community initiative, to be accomplished partly through direct teacher-parent outreach. Freshman academy teachers reported sharing parent contact responsibilities and information and holding parent conferences as a team. They said that the reduced caseload, team structure and common preparatory time helped them connect with parents more completely and efficiently. Teachers also accomplished most parent contact during the regular workday, instead of on personal time [tfg].

> "Before to try and get a hold of 160 parents was difficult. And now that we only have 70 parents to get a hold of, it wasn't so bad" [tfg].
>
> "In our casa, if one of the teachers had trouble getting in contact, they'd fight their way through that problem and pass it onto the other teachers. All four of us didn't have to fight with this kind of problem" [tfg].
>
> "If I'm a Math teacher but he's also having trouble in Science, you could pass that information along, instead of all four teachers having to call" [tfg].

Student survey results provide further evidence that freshman academy teams increased parent outreach at Rio Grande High School. Almost half of freshman academy respondents said a teacher had contacted their parents at least once during the school year, compared to just over one-third of (unteamed) upper-level students ($p < .01$) [ss].[12]

> Figure 8. Percent Students Reporting Teacher Contact with Parents: Freshman Academy Compared to Upper-Level Academies, May 2003.



[12] Fourteen to 17 percent of respondents said they didn't know. Freshman academy respondents were just as likely as upper-level students to say a *counselor* had contacted their parents. The question of parent contact was not included in the Spring 2002 student survey so no comparisons with 2001-02 can be made.

Student Performance

The Freshman Academy's most celebrated accomplishment was pulling Rio Grande High School off the New Mexico Public Education Department's list of schools on probation. For the first time in years, ninth graders' median scores on the reading and language arts portions of the state-mandated standardized test (Terra Nova) exceeded the 40th percentile. Freshman academy students also demonstrated gains in earned grades and credits compared to their non-academy 9th grade predecessors. At the same time, the ninth grade dropout rate plummeted to a historic low of 0.77 percent. Attendance may have improved, but it remained a serious problem nonetheless. Principals and teachers attributed gains to SLC reforms. In particular they credited small class sizes, lower teacher-student ratios and increased contact between principals, teachers and students [tfg, pi].

Test Scores

Rio's 2002-03 Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS) set a student achievement objective of raising ninth grade Terra Nova reading scores by 5 median percentile points compared to the previous year. The Freshman Academy surpassed its objective and demonstrated accomplishments in other subject areas as well.

- Academy students' median percentile score in reading was 7 points higher than that of 9th graders in 2001-02 and 6 points higher in language arts.

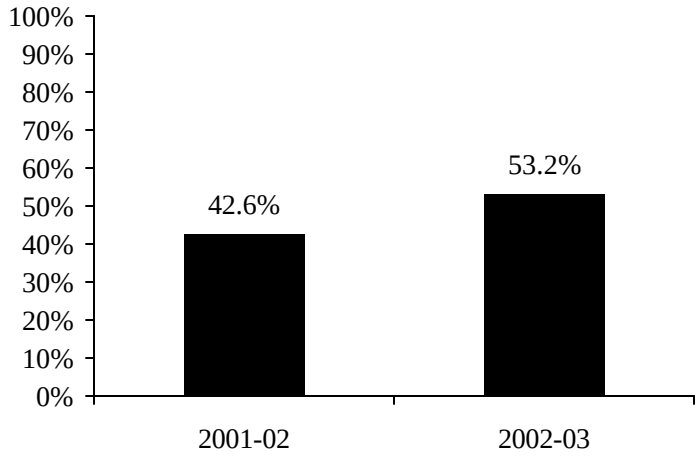
- Academy students surpassed their predecessors by an even larger margin in math and by a total of 9 points overall.

Table 3. Ninth Graders' Median Percentile Terra Nova Scores: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).

Subject Test	2001-02	2002-03	Difference
Reading	36	43	+7
Lang Arts	37	43	+6
Math	27	38	+11
Composite	**34**	**43**	**+9**

Academy students were more likely than 9th graders in 2001-02 to meet or exceed typical academic growth rates from 8th to 9th grade as measured by the TerraNova exam (see Figure). Many other APS high schools improved on this same measure. However Rio Grande improved by 10.6 percentage points, compared to an average of 4.1 percentage points among schools without freshman academies. These results suggest that the freshman academy made progress toward closing the "achievement gap" even in its first year of implementation.

Figure 9. Percent 9th Graders Meeting or Exceeding Typical 8th to 9th Grade Growth on the Terra Nova Exam: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



Grades and Credits Earned

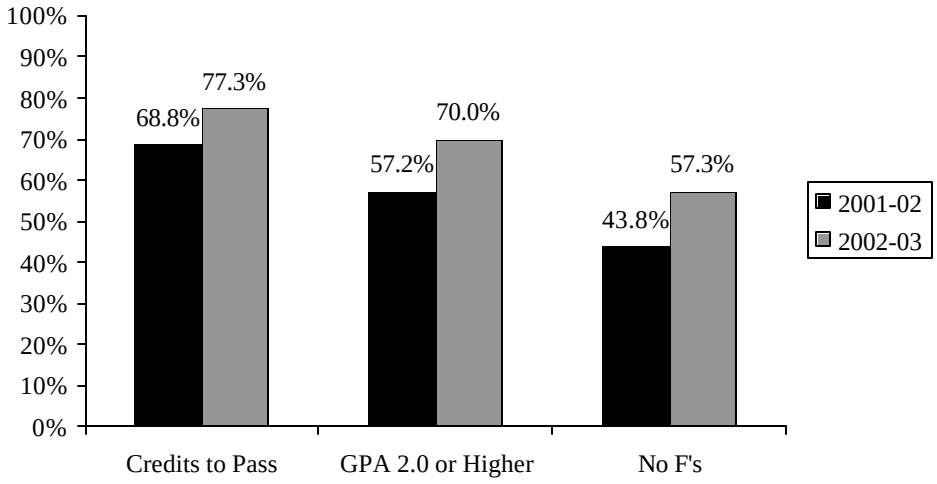
The ultimate goal of small learning communities is to facilitate student learning and academic success. Freshman academy students demonstrated gains in earned grades and credits compared to their non-academy 9th grade predecessors.[13]

- A majority of freshman academy students earned enough credits to pass to the next grade level, surpassing the previous year's record.[14]
- Most freshmen (70%) earned at least a C grade point average for the year, an increase of 13 percentage points compared to 9th graders from 2002-03.
- Over half the freshmen in 2002-03 earned no failing grades, an improvement over the previous year.

[13] All were first-time freshmen.

[14] Of the 483 freshmen present on the 40th day of the 2002-03 school year and at the end of the school year, 307 earned at least 5 credits, while 90 did not.

Figure 10. Percent Ninth Graders Earning Enough Credits to Pass, GPA of C or Higher and No Failing Grades: Academy (2002-03) Compared to Pre-Academy (2001-02).



Dropout

School withdrawal records suggest that Rio Grande's freshman academy accomplished its intended effect of keeping students in school. Only three freshman academy students dropped out during the 2002-03 school year, which represented fewer than 1 percent of all first-time ninth graders.[15] By comparison, 29 (4.9%) first-time ninth grade students dropped out during the 2001-02 school year, prior to establishment of the freshman academy.

Table 4. Number and Percent of Ninth Graders Who Left School During the 2001-02 and 2002-03 School Years (Non-Cumulative).

School Year	Dropout Number	Dropout Percent
2001-02	29	4.9%
2002-03	3	0.6%

Rio Grande High School administrators and staff believed that students' commitment to completing high school was tied to their understanding of how to complete the necessary credits, their knowledge of career opportunities and their level of academic self-confidence [ai, ic]. Evaluation findings suggest that the freshman academy helped

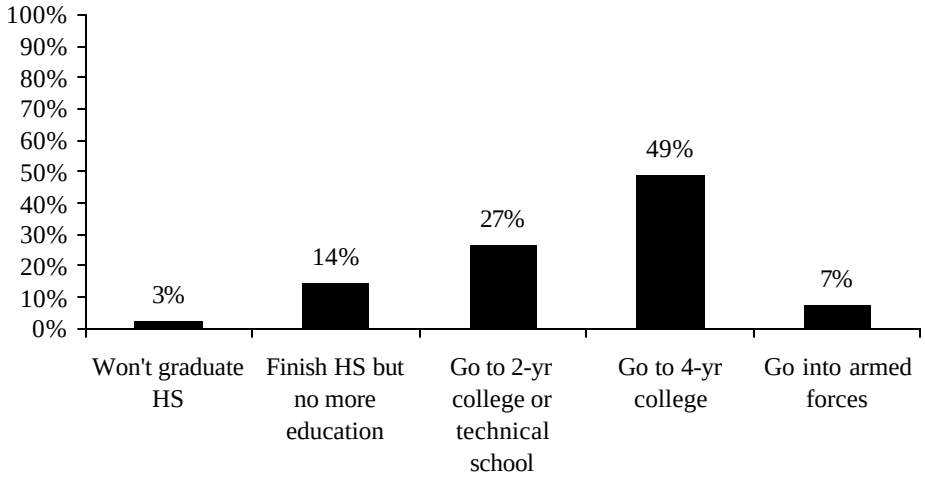
[15] The "SLC dropout formula" differs from the state formula. The state dropout formula defines a "dropout" as a student who drops out of school and does not reenroll in an approved educational program by the 40th day of the following school year. The state formula uses cumulative enrollment and includes students repeating ninth grade. The ninth grade dropout rate using the state formula was 0.77% in 2002-03. The SLC formula: (1) includes only students enrolled on the 40th day of each school year, (2) includes only first-time ninth graders; and (3) excludes the possibility that students reenrolled the following school year.

students develop high school and post-secondary plans, and also raised their academic self-confidence (see Figure 6). One Rio Grande staff member explained that:

> "Freshman academy students are more likely to have a 4-year plan and a belief that they can get through high school. In the past a lot of students at Rio dropped out during 9th or 10th grades. If they made it to 11th grade, they could see the light at the end of the tunnel and push through to graduation. But our problem was with the 9th and 10th graders, the ones who didn't necessarily have plans to go onto college." [ic]

Almost all freshman academy students surveyed in May of 2003 (97.5%) said they intended to finish high school. Three-quarters (75.7%) reported intentions to attend a 2-year or 4-year college (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Freshman Academy Students' Reported Post-Secondary Intentions in 2002-03.



Attendance

One of Rio Grande High School's EPSS objectives for 2002-2003 was to raise the daily attendance rate[16] from 84% in 2001-02 to the state standard of 94%. Data from APS Computer Services suggest that Rio's freshman academy did increase the average daily attendance rate to 91%, but this still fell short of the school's goal. The same data show that fewer than half of freshman academy students (47%) attended at least 94 out of every 100 class periods. However, data collection and management problems, as well as reporting irregularities (see below), limit RDA's ability to speak with certainty about the Freshman Academy's impact on attendance.[17]

[16] The Daily Attendance Rate is the proportion of classes attended, assuming 6 class periods per day.

[17] Attendance figures may be unreliable for a number of reasons: (1) APS' Student Information System recorded students as enrolled in more than one academy; (2) Rio initiated block scheduling in 2002-03, with 2 days per week of 4 classes instead of the standard 6; blocked classes approximated 2 class periods in one; (3) different principals may use different methods of reporting attendance, partly to compensate for block/flex scheduling, which may undermine the validity of comparing one year's results to another's; and (4) the freshman academy principal reported "forgiving" absences for large numbers of students.

Table 5. Rio Grande High School Ninth Grade Attendance Rates in 2002-03.

Attendance Indicators	Freshman Academy	Academies A & B
Average Daily Attendance Rate	91.1	92.0
Percent 9th graders with 94% Daily Attendance Rate or higher	47.2	52.0

Interview findings provide evidence that poor attendance remained a significant problem for Rio Grande High School at all grade levels during the 2002-2003 school year. Administrators and teachers reported that student attendance was as bad or worse than it had been in previous years [ai, tfg]. The freshman academy principal explained that the school ignored student absences in calculating grades because so many students had absences exceeding the state limit that "if we'd included attendance, we'd be repeating half the ninth grade class" [ai-c]. Students from the upper grade levels cited examples of poor attendance like the following:

> "In my world history class we have 6 that show up. On a good day we'll have about 10. It's after lunch. They just go home." [sfg-A/B]

Teachers and students blamed poor attendance on Rio Grande High School's administration, saying it did not consistently communicate and enforce the school's attendance policy. [tfg, sfg-a/b] The Freshman Academy had a Student Management Plan that assigned to individual teachers and teams responsibility for managing tardiness, skipping detention and absenteeism. Teachers reported that they were expected to make calls after a student's first absence. However, they said the administration rarely provided consequences for absences or tardiness, so teachers' efforts had little effect.

> "The tardy policy was nothing. Really, what can you do when a kid shows up late? There was no place to send him at all. Nothing that we could do with him except let him in. And slap his hand maybe. And call his parents and maybe they'd show up on time, but normally they wouldn't." [tfg]

The freshman academy principal explained that Rio's attendance problems were systemic and required systemic solutions. Starting in Kindergarten, he argued, students learned they could pass even without attending class. He explained that students didn't understand the relationships between attendance, credits and grades. His solution was to develop policies in coordination with staff from the elementary and middle schools that fed into Rio Grande High School [pi-c].

Facilitators & Constraints to Success

A range of factors facilitated the successful implementation of small learning communities at Rio Grande High School. Three factors that emerged most clearly were an inclusive planning process, strong principal leadership, and district financial support. Challenging success were a host of other factors. These included hiring delays, fast-track implementation, incomplete vision and plans for upper grade level academies, conflicts between autonomy and unity, insufficient resources for full autonomy, lack of training and support for multi-grade teaming, union regulations, an inflexible district scheduling system, and lack of specificity about necessary SLC program features. Each facilitator and barrier is described below.

Facilitators of Success

Consultative planning process
Between November of 2001 and May of 2002, the APS Director of School to Careers involved students, parents, teachers and administrators in deliberations about various approaches to reform at Rio Grande High School. The School Restructuring Council (SRC) used its weekly meetings to discuss reforms with parents and students. The Director of School to Careers held special planning workshops with the Redesign Action Team, a subgroup of the SRC. Teachers met 2 times per week in the early morning to develop specific proposals. Finally, in February of 2002, a delegation of 15 students, teachers, parents and community representatives visited successful small learning communities in New York City. The main result of these collaborative efforts was a preliminary foundation of consensus and buy-in for the SLC reform initiative.

Strong principal leadership
Interviews with the Freshman Academy principal and staff depicted strong and experienced principal leadership. The freshman academy principal had 12 years of experience creating and managing teacher teams [pi-c]. He articulated clear long-term goals and annual objectives grounded in the realities of his environment and resources. In addition, the freshman academy principal came to APS from another school district. His "outsider" origins/status presented some challenges, but the absence of previously acquired allegiances may have made it easier for him to generate deep reforms.

District financial support
The APS district administration provided resources to hire extra teachers so the school could achieve a maximum student-teacher ratio of 90 to 1. District allocations allowed Rio Grande to hire 3 instructional coaches, one per academy. Instructional coaches played a significant role in facilitating staff development in areas such as differentiated instruction and literacy. District resources also permitted the school to hire four principals, replacing the previous team of one principal and three assistant principals.

Constraints to Success

Delays in hiring academy principals
Principals started their jobs in May instead of January, as had been planned. This seriously limited the amount of time available for planning the details of reform. Principals reported having to spend a majority of their time on fundamentals like scheduling. This left little time to design and ready staff for key SLC innovations such as teacher teaming and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Fast-Track Timeline
Most research has shown that true school reform takes three to five years to accomplish. The district mandated that the conversion of Rio Grande High School to three separate academies had to occur within eight months. Those expectations remained even when the hiring of principals was delayed. This resulted in unrealistic expectations, a chaotic beginning, and negative, enduring first impressions among students, staff and parents. As one principal explained:

> "If the district were to do this again, with another school, they would need a lot more time for the transition process. They put us in here in June and we had to get it ready by August. It was very difficult. It was very difficult for 3 -- at that time 4 -- principals to mesh and work as one and still keep the autonomy they need. It takes time to develop that process." [pi-ao]

Many features required design once principals assumed their new positions: schedules; administrative structures, roles and locations; curricula; teacher teaming and collaboration strategies; academy themes; and student "distribution" procedures. Scheduling problems alone caused mass confusion, and the rush to remedy those problems placed many upper-class students in classes outside their home academy. This ended the notion of separate academies at the upper grade levels. Instability also limited teachers' ability and willingness to implement instructional changes.

Incomplete vision and plan
Staff and students reported a lack of focus in the upper academies. They said the long-term goals, short-term targets and action plans for achieving those targets were unclear. In the words of one staff member, "It's almost like having a boat that has 2 sterns. It doesn't have a good sharp bow. So therefore it's left to go in circles." He said it would take leadership with a strong vision of reform, paired with an ongoing collaborative planning process, to realize the potential of SLC reform at Rio [ic].

Conflict between academy autonomy and school unity
Meeting district leadership's expectations for academy autonomy, parents' demands for equity in academy offerings, and the community's interest in school unity was perhaps the school's greatest challenge, according to upper academy principals. An operations principal was hired to address this challenge. The operations principal managed campus-wide functions and activities, such as security, buildings and grounds, discipline, attendance, athletics, extracurricular activities, band and chorus.

The position of operations principal, in and of itself, may have favored the preservation of unity over the development of autonomy. Alternatively, it may symbolize inherent, irreconcilable conflicts between the two. The operations principal described himself as the "lead" principal and compared the academy principals to "assistant principals" at other high schools. He saw his charge as maintaining the identity of Rio Grande High School as a coherent unit, and ensuring the evenness of opportunity across academies. He acknowledged the goal of developing autonomous academies but gave this a lower priority than unity, as evidenced in the following response to a question about where students should place their primary affiliation:

> "We want them [students] to say Rio Grande [is my primary affiliation], and I'm in academy B, and Mr. So and So is my principal, and my pathway is business." [pi-ao]

Insufficient resources for true autonomy
While acknowledging district financial support, Rio's principals reported that resources were inadequate to achieve full autonomy for each academy.

> "How can you be truly autonomous when you only have one gym? When you only have one wood shop, one chorus room? You can't, it's almost impossible to be truly autonomous in one school setting." [pi-ao]

Another resource limitation that affected academy autonomy and school reform was bussing. The bus company schedule was determined at the cluster level. There were not enough buses to accommodate changes in individual school and academy schedules. As one principal stated, "That's a limitation right there because we're trying to start our professional development with our teachers early in the morning and then have the students come in later on. Well, we can't do that."

Lack of training, experience and technical support for multi-grade teaming.
One principal was assigned responsibility for developing teams at the upper grade levels. She reported that she didn't have any experience with creating multi-grade teams and couldn't get the help she needed from within the district. It wasn't until the 2003 spring semester that she developed a plan for teaming based on an out-of-state SLC program. [pi-b]

Lack of teacher experience, training and comfort with teaming.
Staff at all levels acknowledged that most high school teachers did not have experience with teaming and interdisciplinary instruction. Some were not comfortable with teaming and a few refused to collaborate. Differences between team members sometimes became sources of conflict. Teachers required patience and perseverance as they developed comfort with the concept of teaming and established rapport with each other. Staff noted the importance of professional development for building new skills in teaming and interdisciplinary instruction.

Union regulations
Team meetings could not be mandated because union regulations gave teachers the power to decide how to spend their one individual preparatory period. According to the freshman academy teacher focus group, team collaboration depended on the willingness of each teacher to devote his time to team meetings. The expectation that teachers would use their preparatory periods for team meetings could not be enforced.

Inflexible district scheduling system
APS' scheduling system was not flexible enough to support a 3-academy structure. Staff reported having to hand-schedule scores of students after the Computer Services department delivered a schedule that would have placed 9th graders in classrooms outside the freshman academy. The district's Student Information System continues to require a tedious multi-step, student-by-student process to schedule and code students by team.

Lack of specificity about necessary SLC program features
The redesign framework for Rio Grande High School's small learning communities was a set of general features meant to guide the development of SLC's, "based on current research on best high school practices" [see Appendix B]. The redesign framework shared many components of the SLC model but also omitted the following research-based components:

- Team purity (exclusive assignment of students and teachers to teams).
- Academy purity (exclusive assignment of students and teachers to one academy).
- Common planning time for interdisciplinary teams.
- Continuity in curriculum across multiple grade levels.
- Continuity in teacher and student teams across multiple grade levels.

Conclusions

Rio Grande High School's Freshman Academy implemented key components of the research-based SLC model and achieved notable improvements in school climate and student performance. Compared to their non-academy 9th grade predecessors (2001-02), freshman academy students felt significantly safer, were more collaborative and supportive of their peers, experienced higher academic expectations, and had more academic self-confidence.

Freshman academy grades and test scores showed the kinds of gains that research predicts when students feel supported and challenged academically. For the first time in years, ninth graders' median scores on the reading and language arts portions of the state-mandated standardized test (Terra Nova) exceeded the 40th percentile. This secured the school's release from State probationary status. Freshman academy students also demonstrated gains in earned grades and credits compared to their non-academy 9th grade predecessors. Finally, the ninth grade dropout rate dropped to under 1 percent.

At the upper grade levels, efforts to create small learning communities were far less successful. Each academy had its own principal and electives-based theme, however they did not achieve separate identities, did not implement student and teacher teams, and did not provide for teacher collaboration. Midway through the 2002-03 school year, staff began developing plans for enacting SLC-styled career pathways in the 2003-2004 school year.

Keys to success in the freshman academy were strong principal leadership, district financial support and a consultative planning process. One of the biggest challenges to success was the fast-track timetable for implementation coupled with the late hiring of academy principals. Another major obstacle was the district's Student Information System, which was too cumbersome to support team-based scheduling and caused major disruptions in student scheduling well into the fall of 2002. Finally, conflicts between academy autonomy and school unity accomplished the undoing of Rio Grande's 3-academy system. By the end of the 2003-04 school year, the APS superintendent approved a school-community task force recommendation to unify the three academies under one principal.

Recommendations for Rio Grande High School

Given the dissolution of the 4-principal structure at Rio Grande High School at the end of 2003-04, RDA recommends the following actions:

1. Continue the freshman academy in its 2003-04 form and continue to develop authentic SLCs at the upper grade levels.
Reform requires perseverance and patience. New initiatives tend to take 3 to 5 years to establish, work out glitches and manifest results. Freshman Academy structures and systems should be reinforced and expanded. Upper level academies should continue to work toward SLC goals, in part by developing authentic teacher and student teams.

2. Designate administrative and instructional leaders for each SLC.
Each academy or SLC program requires administrative and instructional leadership that will focus on its particular goals. These leaders need to have time and authority for building staff, curricula and policies that will support the SLC's goals and its particular student body.

3. Implement teaming across all grade levels.
Without teaming, in which teachers and students share a common set of classes and classmates, there can be no small learning community. Teaming must be relatively pure, in that almost all students take all classes within the team, and all teachers on a team share the same students and preparatory periods.

4. Expand interdisciplinary instruction.
Interdisciplinary instruction is a key feature of the small learning communities model, but one that can take multiple years to develop. It also tends to develop at different levels and paces in different teams. Professional development and team-based instructional coaching are important avenues for fostering team comfort and expertise with interdisciplinary instruction. Setting clear goals, e.g., for how many units each team, or pathway, will deliver each semester, can help keep all teams and pathways on track.

5. Clarify and enforce policies related to attendance and discipline, and establish buy-in among teachers for their role in managing attendance and discipline.
Administrators need to establish clear attendance and disciplinary policies, communicate them to staff and students, and make sure they are enforced consistently. RDA also recommends that administrators regularly gather feedback from staff and students regarding attendance and disciplinary practices.

6. Conduct follow-up evaluations to identify changes in student attitudes, school climate and student performance as a result of continued reforms or changes in school structures and strategies.
After just one year of implementation, Rio's freshman academy demonstrated improvements in school climate, student attitudes and student performance. Student surveys and analyses of student performance should be conducted in future years to evaluate the effect of continued reforms or changes in direction.

APPENDIX A: RGHS Fidelity to Small Learning Community (SLC) Model and APS Redesign Framework 2002-2003.

Small Learning Community Model Components		APS Redesign Framework for Rio Grande High School	Actual Implementation	
			Freshman Academy	Academies A and B
Size	SLC's have maximum enrollments of 400-500 students.	Students and teachers are organized into SLC's of not more than 400 students.	40th day enrollment = 483	40th day enrollments: Academy A = 629 Academy B = 587
Autonomy & Distinctive Identity	SLC's are physically separate from one another. Academy staff shares contiguous space.	Create 3 independent, small high schools on the RGHS campus	All core subject classrooms except Science, and all academy staff in Freshman Academy buildings.	Academy administrative offices in separate buildings. Teacher classrooms not all located in academy space.
	Each SLC has distinctive thematic or curricular focus.	1 Ninth Grade Academy 2 Academic Academies for 10-12 graders	Transition from middle school to high school.	A = career, technical education electives B = fine arts & humanities electives
	Each SLC has authority to make decisions re: space, schedule, curriculum, budget, instruction, assessment & personnel.	Independent administrative structures for each "small school." Common school year calendar. Common Family Resource Center Common physical education & extracurricular programs.	1 principal for each academy Budget handled by school-wide "Operations" Principal 2 counselors per academy 1 Instructional Coach per academy Separate report cards & student rankings Separate Instructional Councils for each academy Assessments determined by each academy & district	
Choice & Inclusiveness	SLC populations mirror the demographics of the overall school population. Students and teachers self-select into SLC's.	Heterogenous & representative student body in each academy. Students select academy of choice.	All first-time freshmen enrolled. Bilingual students assigned to 2 teams. 1 Honors team.[tfg, pi]	Enrollment based on electives & principal preferences. Academy A had higher percentages of male and LEP students, & lower entering test scores, grades & attendance.

Small Learning Community Model Components		APS Redesign Framework for Rio Grande High School	Actual Implementation	
			Freshman Academy	Academies A and B
Personalization, Collaboration & Visibility	Interdisciplinary teaching teams	Interdisciplinary teaching teams.	7 Teams (casas) of 4 teachers -- English, Math, Science & Social Studies/Health	1 teaching team with business & marketing focus in Academy A
	Scheduled common time for teacher collaboration	Common preparation time for academy staff.	Common prep scheduled 3 periods per week. Teams actually met 1 block period per week [tfg]. PD 100 hours/week [pi].	Weekly common prep used for PD & school planning [pi]
	Exclusive assignment of students & teachers to teams. Student teams share classes throughout the day. Majority of student's day is SLC-affiliated.		80% - 90% exclusive assignment of students to each teaching team. Teachers taught one upper level course in addition to 4 freshman courses [tfg].	23% of Academy A & B students took classes exclusively in their assigned academy. [RAM 3-30-03] Academies share teachers. No grouping of students.
	Each SLC has ability to alter schedule to meet student needs & to create varied learning opportunities	Flexible student grouping & scheduling	2-hour block schedule twice a week	2-hour block schedule twice a week
	Strategies enable teachers to know, monitor & provide support to individual students.	Teacher daily case loads under 90 Class PTR max = 19:1 Individual student advisories	65 – 82 students per team [plus 5th period]. Class size 13 – 20. No advisories reported.	Teacher caseload = max 90 No advisories.
	Continuity of curriculum, teachers & students over 2-4 years		Design disallowed continuity	Curriculum and academy structures in flux

Small Learning Community Model Components		APS Redesign Framework for Rio Grande High School	Actual Implementation	
			Freshman Academy	Academies A and B
Planning	Inclusive decision-making about school design involves students, teachers, administrators, parents & community members.	Students have input into academy design. Design teams for each academy School Restructuring Council (SRC) & Redesign Action Team	150 student representatives participated in a 4-hour meeting in November 2001. SRC and Action Team planning groups included teachers, parents/guardians and students. A minority of student survey respondents (28%) reported that students had input into the ways things are at RGHS.[18] Academy principals not involved in planning until Summer 2002.	
	Detailed plan for each SLC	District redesign framework Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS)	Student management plan Weekly lesson plan format EPSS	EPSS

[18] 34% of respondents said students did not have input into the way things are at RGHS; 38% didn't know (RDA, Student Survey, Spring 2003, n = 514).

APPENDIX C

Differences Between the Student Bodies of Academies A and B

Compared to Academy B, Academy A had higher percentages of male students and students with limited English proficiency. Academy A also started with a lower achieving student body, as reflected in 8th grade attendance rates, grade point averages and standardized test scores. One principal explained that choices such as putting all bilingual classes and vocationally oriented electives in Academy A paved the way for disequilibrium.

Table C-1. Rio Grande High School 10th – 12th Grade Student Body Profiles in 2002-2003: Academy A Compared to Academy B.

Student Body Characteristic	Academy A	Academy B
Percent Male	57.4	46.0
Percent LEP	35.1	15.2
8th Grade GPA	1.9	2.6
8th Grade Attendance Rate	79.9	89.1
8th Grade Mean TerraNova Scale Score	657	673

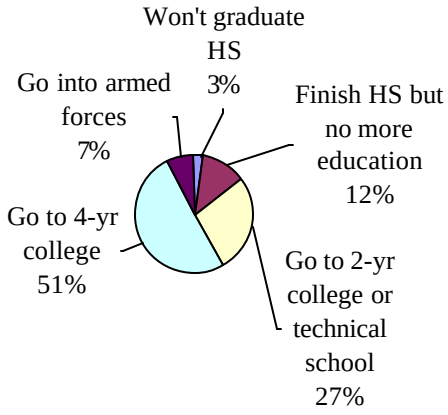
APPENDIX D

2002-2003 Student Survey Results – Post-Secondary Education and Bilingual Seal

At the request of RGHS staff members, RDA added a number of questions to the 2002-03 student survey. Results from students in all 3 academies are described below.

Post-Secondary Education
A majority of student survey respondents (78.1%) reported intentions to finish high school and go onto college or technical school. Over half said they planned to go to a four-year college.

Figure D-1. 2002-03 Rio Grande High School Students' Post-Secondary Intentions.



Over two-thirds of all students surveyed indicated that they knew what credits and grades they needed in order to get into college. Upper-class students were more likely than freshman academy students to understand college requirements ($p < .01$). Just about half the survey respondents felt sure they knew how to finance their education after high school.[19]

Table D-1. Percent of 2002-03 Rio Grande High School Students Reporting Knowledge of Post-Secondary Requirements.

Survey Item	Percent *Very Sure* or *Pretty Sure*	
	Freshman Academy (n = 206)	Academies A and B (n = 324)
I'm sure I know what class credits and grades are needed to get into college.	62.1%	70.7%
I'm sure I know how to get financial support to continue my education after high school.	44.2	50.9

[19] Differences between freshman academy and upper-level academy students could be due to chance (statistically insignificant).

Bilingual Seal

Under half of students responding to the spring 2003 student survey reported knowing how to earn a Bilingual Seal on their diploma. Upper-class students were slightly more likely than freshmen to understand bilingual seal requirements ($p < .01$).

Table D-2. Percent of 2002-03 Rio Grande High School Students Reporting Knowledge of Bilingual Seal Requirements.

Survey Item	Percent *Very Sure* or *Pretty Sure*	
	Freshman Academy (n = 206)	Academies A and B (n = 324)
I'm sure I know what's required to earn a Bilingual Seal on my diploma.	39.4%	49.7%

Moreover, three-quarters of students surveyed either said they were not getting the counseling they needed to help them choose the right courses for a Bilingual Seal, or didn't know if they were.

Table D-3. Percent 2002-03 Rio Grande High School Students Reporting Satisfaction with Bilingual Seal Counseling.

Survey Item	Percent Responding (n = 519)		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
I am getting the counseling I need to help me choose the right courses for a Bilingual Seal.	24.3	54.7	21.0

Results suggest that students need more help to understand and prepare for the Bilingual Seal.