

EVALUATION BRIEF

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APS SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

YEAR ONE EVALUATION FINDINGS 2004-05

BACKGROUND

APS has a second round of federal funding to implement small learning communities (SLCs) at 3 high schools (Valley, Manzano and Highland) for 3 years (2004-05 to 2006-07). APS' SLC grant application proposed a range of strategies including: teacher and student teams, common preparatory times, interdisciplinary approaches, advisory groups, and SLC-specific staff development. To fulfill grant requirements, APS hired an external consultant to collaborate with RDA in evaluating SLC program implementation and outcomes. This evaluation brief is based on school site visits and staff interviews.

YEAR ONE EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. Each of the 3 funded schools is attempting to implement a freshman academy, as well as career pathways or academies at the upper grade levels.
2. Strengths include an innovative portfolio design, a well-developed and separately housed freshman academy, and a strong health occupations consortium that partners school and community agencies.
3. Achieving effective small learning communities at the 3 grant-funded schools is constrained by the following factors (school leaders may not have been aware of a need to address some factors):
 - Teachers have not been provided comprehensive professional development in team collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction.
 - Teaching teams have insufficient common planning periods, or lack them altogether.
 - Teachers' classrooms are scattered across school campuses rather than being clustered by team.
 - There is confusion about what SLCs should look like at the upper grade levels.
 - Many teachers lack awareness of their schools' SLC plans.
 - No one is promoting, coordinating and ensuring consistent and complete SLC implementation.

YEAR ONE DISTRICT-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Appoint an APS lead to coordinate the following functions:

1. Define how the career-based groups in the upper grades will emulate the SLC model, and agree on standard names and definitions for each strategy (e.g., career academy versus career pathway).
2. Provide teachers with high quality professional development in teaming and interdisciplinary instruction by pooling schools' SLC funds and collaborating with other staff development initiatives.
3. Provide each school with proactive technical assistance and ongoing guidance on how to achieve small learning communities based on SLC research and the high school redesign framework.