



**ALBUQUERQUE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Freshman Academies Final Evaluation Report

2004 – 2008

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Freshman Academy Final Evaluation Report 2004-08

Executive Summary

The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) received a three-year grant in October 2004 to implement small learning communities (SLCs) at Highland, Manzano, and Valley High Schools. The grant proposed implementation of a Freshman Academy and several career academies at each of the three participating schools. The Freshman Academy was the most well-implemented of the SLC structures and this report provides an in-depth look at both the challenges and accomplishments of Freshman Academy implementation in these schools. An overall evaluation report for the entire small learning communities project is also available from RDA.

Key Strategies Implemented

Interdisciplinary Teams.

- Freshman Academies consisting of teams of approximately 90 students and three core teachers were implemented at both Manzano and Valley High Schools.
- Most of the teachers in FA teams had a common prep period and met about once a week to discuss student needs and plan interdisciplinary instruction.
- Although a separate physical location is an important aspect of small learning communities, neither of the schools accomplished this goal.

Curriculum & Instruction.

- Both schools successfully scheduled students and teachers with a half-day block of uninterrupted instructional time, though the flexibility that this scheduling offers has not yet been utilized.
- Some interdisciplinary lessons with opportunities for independent research are being planned and implemented by FA teachers, though the goal of a largely integrated course of study based on topics or themes of high interest to adolescents, relevant to their cultural backgrounds, has not yet been achieved.
- FA teachers have not yet collaborated with community partners to design curricula, extend class work into community contexts, or engage outside experts as partners in assessing student work.

Inclusive Program and Practices.

- Though FA teachers routinely tailor instruction, adjust assignments, and provide options in their individual classes to differentiate instruction, pull-out programs and ability-based classes (e.g., remedial math, AP English) continue to impede heterogeneous grouping of students.
- Student advisory programs have been implemented in all three high schools to increase personalization and to focus on planning for college and careers.

SLC-Based Continuous Program Improvement.

- Most FA teams have not yet begun the process of systematically and collaboratively analyzing data for their students as a way to evaluate program effectiveness.
- With a few exceptions, FA teachers did not attend any professional development of their own choice or specific to the needs of their students.

Results

- For teachers, the FA resulted in a greater awareness of student needs and more unified expectations for student behavior and academics, as well as the beginnings of collaboration and interdisciplinary instruction.
- Valley freshmen reported significantly higher teacher academic expectations, peer support for academics, and improved self-efficacy when compared to freshman prior to Academy implementation.
- A significantly higher percentage of Academy freshmen also believed that their teachers tried to be fair and listened to what they had to say, suggesting that the Academy structure contributed to positive relationships with teachers at Valley. They also felt more recognized for their efforts, though didn't feel significantly more attached to school or visible.

Recommendations

Increasing Personalization and Ensuring Equity.

- Place all freshmen in small interdisciplinary teams so that students have the same teachers and classmates for all of their core academic courses and teachers have common prep periods.
- Establish a separate location for each FA team.
- Create student advisory groups of 15-25 students who meet at least once a week and remain with the same advisor for three to four years. Provide the professional development necessary for teachers to be effective advisors who work closely with families, other teachers, and students to ensure that necessary academic and personal supports are available for each student.
- Create truly heterogeneous FA teams by carefully adjusting scheduling and eliminating assignment of whole groups of students to a particular team.
- Eliminate pull out programs and tracking by ability level; instead assign special education, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and counselors to all teams to meet needs for differentiation within the core team.

Implementing Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum Through Professional Collaboration.

- Provide funding for at least 10 days of professional development each school year plus common prep periods for all FA team teachers.
- Professional development should focus on continuous, high quality opportunities for learning that integrate pedagogy and content and provide opportunities for application, practice, and coaching.

- Engage teachers in the collaborative development of challenging, interdisciplinary curriculum, rigorous performance assessments, and continuous analysis of student work.
- Develop a largely integrated course of studies for the freshman year that is based on topics or themes of high interest to adolescents. Relate curriculum to students' lives, cultural backgrounds and personal interests to increase motivation and engagement.
- Hold high expectations for all students and provide additional classes and tutoring to help freshmen with skills deficits access the same challenging curriculum.

Evaluation Introduction

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of the evaluation was to document the implementation of Freshman Academies in three Albuquerque high schools and to determine their impact on students and teachers. Due to incomplete and inconsistent implementation of Freshman Academy structures, the evaluation focused more heavily on documentation of implementation rather than assessment of outcomes. Although some short-term outcomes for teachers and students were measured it was not appropriate to collect data on long term academic outcomes, such as student achievement and graduation rates. Baseline student survey and student performance data were collected at all three high schools prior to implementation of the Freshman Academies in 2006, and intermediate data was collected one year later, in the spring of 2007, at the two schools where a FA was implemented. See Table 1.

Table 1. Freshman Academy Evaluation Activities

| Instrument | Date Administered |
|--|----------------------------|
| Student Performance Data (H MV) | Spring 2006 |
| Student Survey (M V) | Spring 2006 Spring 2007 |
| Team Teacher Interviews (M V) | January 2007 |
| Teacher Survey (M V) | April 2008 |
| Review of Interdisciplinary Lessons | April 2008 |
| Meeting with Teacher Leadership Team (M) | April 2008 |
| Interviews, Meetings with Core Teams (H) | Spring 2008 |

The letters in parentheses indicate the high school where the instrument was administered.

The student survey measured school climate and student attitudes using selected items from surveys developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (2000) and incorporating suggested revisions from RDA. The survey addressed school safety, teacher trust, peer support for academic work, school and academic engagement, expectations for academic achievement, self-efficacy, peer relations, teachers' academic supportiveness, school attachment, visibility, and school relevance. Baseline student performance data was collected on attendance, Grade Point Average (GPA) and high school credits earned, along with relevant student demographic information. Copies of the evaluation instruments are contained in Appendix A.

Freshman Academy team teacher interviews and teacher surveys were based on the Small Learning Communities Self-Assessment in Five Domains of Research-based SLC Practice, developed by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. In addition to assessing implementation of key practices, the instruments collected information about teacher collaboration, development of interdisciplinary lessons or units, instructional and

assessment practices, student and family contacts, and perceptions of changes in attitudes or achievement of students.

Limitations of Evaluation

Unfortunately, due to a problem with the scanning, accurate pre-post comparisons on the student survey could be made at only one of the two high schools that implemented a Freshman Academy. Student data was not collected at the end of 2008 because the principals did not think the implementation of the Freshman Academy was sufficiently different than the previous year to warrant additional surveying. Principals also advised evaluators against evaluating student performance outcomes at this early stage in implementation.

Implementation

Introduction

One of the strategies used by many high schools across the country to help middle school students make a successful transition to high school is a Freshman Academy. Abundant research evidence exists showing that the first year of high school is “pivotal in terms of adjustment and achievement” (Donegan, 2008, p.54). Bottoms (2004), the founding director of High Schools That Work, indicates that students who enter high school with weak skills are more likely to lose interest in school and to dropout; APS has also found the freshman year to be critical. To meet these needs, APS planned to implement a Freshman Academy at each of the three high schools participating in the SLC grant, and mid-way through the grant, Manzano and Valley High schools had done so. Freshman Academy teams at these two schools were interviewed based on Oxley’s (2007) *Self-Assessment in Five Domains of Research Based SLC Best Practice* and detailed results and recommendations were presented in the Small Learning Communities Mid-Year-Three Program Evaluation Report (Johns, 2007). As a follow-up, in the spring of 2008, these teachers also completed a survey based on the previous instrument to assess their progress towards full implementation of research-based strategies for effective Freshman Academies. At Highland, information was collected by meeting with the principal, the small learning communities coordinator, and teachers in one of the “core teams” working with freshmen students.

According to small learning communities research, there are five key domains of effective practice: 1) interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams, 2) rigorous, relevant curriculum and instruction, 3) inclusive programs and practices, 4) data-driven continuous program improvement, and 5) building and district level support for the implementation of autonomous, self-governing small learning communities (Oxley, 2007). Continuing research on effective high schools has reiterated the importance of these key characteristics, though they may be labeled or grouped differently. For example, the School Redesign Network (SRN) Leadership, Equity, and Accountability in Districts and Schools (LEADS) at Stanford University identified three primary design features: personalization, rigorous and relevant instruction, and professional learning and collaboration; as well as implications for five critical areas of policy change: organization and governance, human capital, curriculum and assessment, funding, and postsecondary education (SRN, 2007). To ensure clarity and continuity, the original small learning communities terms will be used in this report.

Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Teams

Teacher Teams

By the end of the grant, Manzano and Valley High schools had established interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams of the recommended size in their Freshman Academies, although the teams, in some cases, were less “pure” than in the previous

school year. In other words, due to scheduling difficulties, a smaller percentage of students had all of their core classes with the same team of teachers. Valley attempted to add math teachers in their Freshman Academy teams, but due to scheduling difficulties ended up substituting math teachers for history/health teachers. The assistant principal felt this had seriously impacted progress because many of the math teachers were resistant to the idea of teaming. Although Valley is planning to revert to the original FA team structure, at least one of the math teachers indicated that s/he wants to continue to be part of the FA team, so perhaps this decision can be made on an individual basis.

Teacher Collaboration

Manzano and Valley successfully arranged Freshman Academy teachers' schedules so that the teams had a common prep period with most or all of their team members. At Highland, all of the teachers at each grade level who had a common prep were grouped into core teams that met weekly to discuss academics. Since prep periods have in the past been time for personal preparation only, FA teachers usually dedicated only one prep period a week (less than an hour) to meet with their teams, although some teams supplemented this by meeting during lunch or after school. Rarely did teachers have extended opportunities to do any collaborative planning, with the occasional exception of a few hours at the beginning of the school year. Most of the meeting time was spent discussing individual student needs and coordinating team activities, although there was slightly more emphasis during the fourth year on planning interdisciplinary instruction.

Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) found in the LEADS study of study of five California schools highly successful in meeting the needs of low-income students of color, that in addition to allocating several hours each week for collaborative planning and problem solving, fully 7-15 days per year were devoted each year to shared professional learning time. This time was spent on a very intentional approach to developing coherent curriculum, examining student progress, and providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. Without district financial support for extensive teacher professional development, skilled leadership, and the autonomy to plan this time according to individual school needs, the potential of teacher collaboration will remain largely unrealized in small learning communities in APS.

Separate Location

Classroom and office space conducive to collaboration remains elusive in the schools. Most of the FA teachers indicated that their classroom is not near any of the other teachers on their team, while a few reported being located close to one other team member. None of the teachers even has an office, much less office space common to the team. Team meetings occurred in each other's classrooms. While teachers have tried to make the best of this less-than-ideal arrangement, several noted that it is much easier to communicate with each other when their classrooms are located next door. Although the possibility exists for eventually housing freshman in a separate building at Highland, and although other APS high schools have managed to group classrooms together by team, it is clear that these three schools have given up on attempting to attain this goal at this

time. While this may not be the most important element in creating personalized learning environments for students, Oxley (2007) concludes after reviewing many studies “*that physical proximity is instrumental to key small learning community functions. Physical proximity of teachers’ classrooms facilitates teacher collaboration, promotes interaction among teachers and students and helps to establish a separate identity and sense of community among members*” (p.25). She further notes that although SLCs can make do with only a pair of adjacent classrooms, teacher collaboration and student identification with the team will probably suffer. “*The inability to designate more adequate space may also reflect a lack of schoolwide commitment to SLCs and the need to make painful adjustments to optimize their functioning. Other SLC requirements are likely to be compromised as well*” (Oxley, p.25).

Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

When high schools were established a century ago in the United States, only 10% of the 14-17 year old population attended high school, and getting a well paying job without a diploma was the norm (Wise, 2008). Today, 90% of well-paying jobs require not just a high school diploma, but postsecondary education or training, as well, and all students are expected to graduate from high school (US Department of Labor, 2006). Yet high schools have remained essentially unchanged, plagued by a model that is out-dated and irrelevant. Instead of completely restructuring high schools to meet the needs of today’s global economy, most reform efforts have resulted in piecemeal additions to the current system. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the isolated, content-based approach to curriculum and instruction that characterizes most high schools in the United States.

Curriculum

In a well-implemented SLC, curriculum is presented to students through a largely integrated course of study that is based on topics or themes of high interest to adolescents and that is relevant to their cultural backgrounds. For example, a freshman academy theme might be Change, which provides rich possibilities for connections across disciplines and is an apt metaphor for adolescents. Or a guiding question might be used to organize instruction for an activity, a unit, or the whole year, e.g. Exploration or Exploitation? Although the APS Freshman Academy teams have a name, they are not really theme-based and the interdisciplinary instruction has focused on establishing connections across disciplines in the prescribed standards-based curriculum for ninth graders. Initially, teams attempted to integrate one or two interdisciplinary activities, while by the end of the grant most teachers reported implementing “several” interdisciplinary lessons or projects. For example, one team coordinated a poetry unit in both English and Biology classes; another integrated math and science by investigating the environmental principles that affect population growth of deer and graphing the relationships between oxygen level and depth of water in lakes. Another team assigned a story, graded by three different teachers, about a plant or animal native to New Mexico that included mathematical problems, cultural references, and science content. In another project, math and English were combined when students learned how to calculate

statistical probability and then used statistics to inform and persuade in a speech. Finally, poetry, art, history and mathematics were integrated in Pi-Day activities.

Another important facet of curriculum is that it be rigorous, standards-based, and available to all students. *“To accomplish this, staff must first eliminate academic tracks and courses that water down content and provide support sufficient to enable all students to access the core curriculum”* (Oxley, 2007, p.40). This has not yet happened in the Freshman Academy at either high school and will be further discussed in a subsequent section.

Half-Day Block of Instructional Time

Although more than half of the freshmen in both Freshman Academies are scheduled so they have three consecutive periods with their team, thus far no attempt has been made to team teach or to group all of the students together for special activities except for initial team building activities at the beginning of the year or an awards ceremony at the semester’s end. This deserves consideration because an extended block of time makes possible a wide variety of projects both at school and in the community—the type of projects that help students apply their learning in real-world contexts and motivate them to remain in school (Bridgeland, 2008). In addition, grouping students differently enables teachers to provide remediation or enrichment to a small group of students and can free one or more teachers to plan, develop interdisciplinary curriculum, or participate in professional development activities.

Collaboration with Community Partners

At this point in the development of Freshman Academies, there has been no collaboration with community partners. In highly effective SLCs teachers work with community partners to design curricula that is grounded in real world work, to extend classwork into community contexts that are related to the topics being studied, and to provide more opportunities for authentic assessment by including the partners as outside experts (Oxley, 2007). Although the connection is much more obvious in career-based small learning communities, collaboration with outside experts can still be of great benefit in a Freshman Academy by facilitating the creation of a curriculum that is relevant to the world outside school and has personal meaning for students.

Active, Authentic Inquiry

The majority of APS FA teachers at both schools engage their students in some independent research. For example, a Biology teacher had students research problems and solutions related to global warming, as well as the experiments of famous scientists with proposed new approaches. An English teacher involved students in research on Greek and Roman gods as well as historical influences regarding Communism and WWII. Another FA teacher had students conduct research on genetics and prepare a research paper and PowerPoint presentation on cells and ecology. Prior to reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, an English teacher had students research the French Revolution to provide

illuminating historical background. Several teachers also assigned research on careers and pertinent health-related topics. Although it may not be appropriate for the freshman year, SLC best practices research suggests that students should play a very active role in designing and carrying out their academic work. For example, students would help teachers identify problems to study, questions to research, books to read, and methods of demonstrating their knowledge and understanding. They might also “*engage in problem-based learning that requires them to collect and critically analyze information, defend their conclusions, and make indepth oral and written presentations of their findings*” (Oxley, 2007). This is important because an active mode of acquiring knowledge leads to heightened student achievement.

Inclusive Programs and Practices

Teacher and Student Choice of SLC

Both teachers and students originally were assigned to a Freshman Academy team, although more teachers now report that they chose to be a part of their team. This suggests that after working together for several years the teachers now perceive their continued involvement in their FA team as a positive choice they make. Self-selection by students may be more relevant to career academies than Freshman Academies. However, choice at the upper grades is essential—research indicates “*success depends in large part on a self-chosen membership that shares a commitment to the SLC’s unique focus or mission*” (Oxley, 2007, p.54).

Flexible Use of Time and Space

All of the teachers who completed a survey reported that their FA uses the same schedule as the rest of the school. Quint (2008) indicates that flexibility in altering the instructional schedule to assist 9th graders who enter high school with weak academic skills is one of the most productive reforms that high schools can make. For example, Talent Development high schools use double-blocked scheduling, which means that core classes meet for 80 or 90 minutes, and students are able to cover a year’s worth of material in one semester. Students with weak numeracy and literacy skills are enrolled in intensive catch-up courses in English and math during the first semester, so that by the second semester they can access the college preparatory classes for full-credit during the spring. This is the schedule that Highland High School uses. Other ways to alter the instructional schedule include teaching extra periods of instruction in core courses to fewer classes of students by integrating an elective into the core and creating advisory periods of varying lengths. As mentioned in a previous section, the potential flexibility of the block scheduling of FA core classes has not yet been tapped.

Tailoring Instruction to Diverse Student Needs

Freshman Academy teachers constantly tailor instruction, adjust assignments, and provide options for the students in their individual classes. However, a significant disparity exists between teams because of the way students are assigned. For example,

students at Valley who select analytical biology or AP English are grouped into the same team which, by default, is more advanced. The remaining teams end up with lower achieving students, including some who read at only the second or third grade level. ESL students are not fully functioning members of the teams either because they take their English class with an ESL teacher or because their selection of Ballet Folclórico as an elective interferes with their team schedule. One teacher told me the ESL students were “*sad*” that they couldn’t be on teams with the other kids. Several of the teams have mainstreamed A or B level special education students and the special ed teachers meet with the teams on a regular basis. However, both team teachers and special ed teachers believe that integrating special ed students with more severe needs into the teams does neither these students, nor their classmates a favor. At Manzano, all of the students who are taking Math Readiness are grouped in one Freshman Academy, which also includes a significant number of ESL students who go to a different class for English.

It is essential that tracking and ability grouping in the FA teams be eliminated because these practices contribute to the poor academic performance of low income and ethnic minority students who are overrepresented in these tracks (Futrell and Gomez, 2008). An argument for not placing similar students together was presented by a FA teacher, “Once a critical mass of the students on a team decide it is not ‘cool’ to work, they reinforce each other for three periods.” The traditional school practice of addressing students’ needs in separate contexts (such as ESL classes, pull-out special education, etc.) must be replaced with a model in which teaching specialists, such as ESL and special education teachers are assigned to SLCs to provide instructional interventions and support in the mainstreamed classroom. “*Exclusion of special education students from SLCs may seem to lighten the instructional burden, but at the same time excludes special educators with pedagogical expertise needed to help content-area specialists diversify their instructional strategies*” which is a key to instructional effectiveness (Legters in Oxley, 2007, p.55).

Although heterogeneous grouping can create challenges for classroom teachers, with appropriate professional development and redistribution of teaching staff so that specialists work closely with all teams, the challenges can be minimized. It is certainly worth the effort because it can lead to higher achievement for those students who are most in need of our help. Three years after eliminating homogeneous grouping, the percentage of low-income students who earned a Regents diploma (the more academically rigorous credential in New York) increased from 22% to 71% and the percentage of minority students doing so surpassed the statewide average for white and Asian students (Garrity, 2004).

In addition to ensuring that Special Education and ESL teachers are integral members of SLCs, the SLC literature suggests that counselors should not only work exclusively with students in the SLCs to which they are assigned, but should also be integral members of the interdisciplinary teams assisting with special projects and learning activities. All three high schools now have a counselor assigned exclusively to the freshmen students and at Valley, the counselor was quite involved during the 2007-08 school year in planning and conducting advisory sessions for all of the ninth graders. He was perceived by several of

the FA teachers as an integral part of their team. One teacher said appreciatively, “He rocks my world!”

Student Advisory Programs

It was the intent of the SLC grant to implement a student advisory program in the Freshman Academies to address the academic and social development of students. By placing each student in a small advisory group that met several times a week, positive connections with an adult could be fostered for each student and academic progress more closely monitored.

All three high schools established student advisory programs that have evolved during the course of the grant. At Manzano, freshmen were placed in advisory groups with one of their FA team teachers and met weekly. Most advisors used the curriculum that had been developed by Manzano’s teacher leadership team, focusing on personal goals, career exploration, and discussion of special topics such as academic honesty and plagiarism. At Valley, freshmen were placed with advisors that were not necessarily a member of their FA team and advisory time was used for tutoring, Next Step plans, free reading, and help with homework. In addition, the ninth grade principal and counselor met monthly with freshmen through their English classes to address a wide variety of important topics, including: academic supports (such as tutoring, homework hotline, and summer school), career and college information (selecting a career pathway, college requirements and financial aid), understanding and dealing with sexual harassment, and underage drinking. At Highland, an across-the-board advisory program was implemented for all students with a focus for freshmen on making a successful transition to high school. Curriculum was developed by an advisory committee and provided for teacher use. The Highland advisory program was studied in depth and a separate report on this is available through RDA (Johns, 2008).

Although FA teachers at Manzano implemented the advisory curriculum that was provided to them, some teachers disliked the curriculum (calling it “inane”) or were uncomfortable in a counseling role. For example, one teacher said, “Unfortunately advisory meetings with students are not a useful or valuable way to engage the students. We are not counselors, we are teachers.” These comments suggest that there is still some resistance to advisory programs and that additional discussion and professional development is important to help teachers comfortably and effectively take on these new and unfamiliar roles. While Highland teachers who responded to the survey reported mixed reactions to the advisory lesson plans, they felt the curriculum was improving each year. More importantly, both students and teachers believed that advisory had fostered close relationships and provided an opportunity to discuss issues of importance to teens.

Beginning in the fall of 2008, Manzano will continue to have a separate advisory program for freshmen and the remainder of the students will be placed in a multi-grade advisory group with a teacher from their career academy. This teacher will be the student’s advisor for three years (sophomore through senior), thereby facilitating close relationships by providing an extended opportunity to become acquainted. Advisory

groups will meet twice a month except during the months with vacations (December and March). At Valley, students will be placed in an advisory group for all four years of high school. At the time of report preparation, the faculty had not yet decided whether the student cohort would remain the same for all four years while the teacher changed or whether the teacher would remain the same and the student group would change as seniors graduated and new sophomores were added. Regardless, advisory groups at Valley will meet weekly. At Highland, students will be placed in a new advisory group each year of high school; in the junior and senior years the advisory group teacher may be part of the student's selected career academy.

As APS schools continue to revise their student advisory programs it is important that research-based best practices be implemented. For maximum impact, advisories should meet weekly for a sufficient amount of time to accommodate individual advisement, whole group activities, and student initiated planning for SLC activities and events that include parents. Students should be assigned to their advisors for multiple years and an effort made to place them with a teacher who instructs one or more of their classes or sponsors them in an extracurricular activity. Although Highland teachers felt that fostering close relationships was the greatest potential of advisory, most teachers didn't feel they had gotten to know their students as well as they could have if more attention had been paid to how the students were assigned.

In a study of five California high schools with outstanding success in helping low income students of color graduate and attend college, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) noted that in most of these schools each teacher had a small advisory group of 15-25 students that met several times a week and remained together from two to four years. In order to support this degree of personalization traditional staff patterns were redesigned to hire more classroom-based staff enabling the schools to maintain small classes and an overall reduced pupil-load of 50-100 students for each teacher. Teachers also taught fewer students for longer blocks of time, which enabled them to get to know their students' strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles so they could tailor instruction to suit them.

It is also important to continue to provide teachers with high quality lesson plans and suggestions for advisory activities that address topics such as career exploration, postsecondary educational opportunities, goal setting, motivation, and issues of social and emotional importance to teens. In addition, the focus of advisory should be broadened so that it systematically organizes counseling, academic supports, and connections with families. Developing a strong advisory program takes time, funding, and commitment, but it is worth the effort. In a study of small schools, students reported that caring relationships, characterized by unwavering teacher access, support, and pressure, were the most powerful force in getting them to achieve at higher levels and graduate (Aness, 2003). However, small-schools alone do not guarantee this outcome, it takes a single-minded "determination to establish and sustain such relationships as a norm of the school's culture" (Aness, 2008, p.50).

Collaboration with Parents

The small learning community conception of teaching and learning is based on the idea that optimal teaching occurs when teachers, students, and parents know each other well and share a commitment to the school's mission. This broad base of collaboration expands teachers' knowledge of individual students' learning needs, thereby enabling teachers to increase the consistency of students' educational experiences. Parent collaboration allows for more consistent communication of expectations and strategies for learning, which is key to program coherence and increased student achievement (Newmann, 2001).

FA teachers were asked how often someone from their team contacted each student's parents during the school year. Answers varied from "We don't have enough time for that" to weekly contacts. Generally, teachers contacted parents at least once besides the regularly scheduled conference times at the beginning and end of the year, and usually several times a month. A few teams invited parents to special student presentations, but the majority of teachers indicated their team did not plan any special events during this last school year to which parents were invited. Although FA teams could more creatively and effectively involve parents, communication and collaboration is not their responsibility alone. Collaboration with parents should be an integral part of each school's mission and everyone's responsibility—the advisor can play an especially important role.

Too often parents are contacted only when there are discipline problems or when students are already failing. In a study of high school dropouts, 71% of students who had dropped out felt that one of the keys to keeping them in school was to have better communication with their parents. Less than half said their school contacted either them or their parents when they were absent or when they finally dropped out (Bridgeland, 2006). Establishing collaborative relationships among parents, teachers, and students is a complex process and becomes increasingly more difficult as students progress through school. There are many barriers to effective parent involvement and they are beyond the scope of this report. However, strong collaborative relationships are essential for student success, especially for those students whose parents are least likely to be involved in their education, and should be an important focus of the continued implementation of small learning communities in APS high schools. For more information about this vital aspect of SLC's see Darling-Hammond (2008) and Van Velsor & Orozco (2007).

Continuous Program Improvement

Continuous Program Improvement

"Research indicates that small learning communities will realize their promise only if SLC teams engage in a continuous process of improvement" (Oxley, 2007, p.72). This requires regular reflection by team members on their practice, analysis of a variety of sources of data such as student work, grades, attendance, achievement test scores, and their perceptions of and satisfaction with the SLC. Ultimately, after SLCs have been well

implemented for several years it is important to conduct follow up with graduates to determine if their high school preparation enabled them to gain admission to post-secondary education or job-training opportunities. Schools may also wish to disaggregate data on ethnicity and socioeconomic status of students pursuing each SLC to ensure that they continue to attract a diverse group of students who are representative of the school community.

FA teachers were asked which sources of data they used in their classrooms last year to evaluate their students and to make changes to their curriculum. The vast majority (93% of the 26 teacher respondents) used attendance, grades, or course credits; about three-fourths used teacher-made tests/assessments (77%) and informal observations (70%); and approximately half used standardized test results (58%) and student feedback (50%). Several teachers indicated that standardized test results were not very helpful because they were received too late (after they no longer had those students) or they weren't separated by teams so that they had to manually locate their students' scores from the entire freshman class. Teachers expressed an interest in making greater use of existing student achievement data such as the scores on the 8th and 11th grade Standards-Based Assessments, the Gates-McGinnity reading test, and the new high school Assess to Learn (A2L) interim benchmark assessments. These scores, in order to be useful, must be provided as soon as possible after administration and scoring, and grouped by Freshman Academy or Career Academy team. In addition, schools may need assistance in interpreting the results and what they mean for instruction. While individual teachers are very adept at analyzing student work on a continuous basis and making adjustments in their teaching, most FA teams have not yet begun the process of systematically and collaboratively analyzing data for their students as a way to evaluate program effectiveness. Professional development would be very helpful in moving the teachers forward in this process. In addition, many excellent resources on data-driven instructional improvement are available for teachers to use.

Ancess (in Oxley, 2007) suggests that when considering how to improve practice, teachers can benefit from students' routine involvement in identifying problems and potential solutions. Many of the teachers on Freshman Academy teams regularly solicit student feedback regarding assignments, what they liked, what helped them learn, what they would like to do differently, etc. However, there is not a systematic effort by the team as a whole to consider the perceptions of students and other stakeholders such as parents, administrators, and teachers. Again, the assistance of critical friends such as district evaluators, instructional coaches, and peers is necessary to help teachers establish practical student data collection and analysis routines.

Professional Development

Teachers in the FA, for the most part, did not attend any professional development of their own choice or specific to the needs of their students. A continuing problem in APS is that professional development is primarily planned at the district level in a "one-size-fits-all" approach without consulting teachers about their needs. For example, last year inservice was provided on Teaching and Learning with Text. While some teachers found

this helpful, others indicated it was “a total waste of time and resources.” In addition, teachers have been subject to frequent changes in the direction of professional development in the district (described by some as a “flavor-of-the-month” approach) resulting in an attitude of “don’t put forth too much effort because this, too, shall pass.” FA teachers were unaware that the literature on best practices for effective small learning communities places teams in charge of formulating their own professional development plans that might include team planning, collegial exchange, and teacher experts to address specific needs identified by the team.

When asked what type of professional development opportunities would be the most beneficial in meeting the needs of their freshmen the most frequent response was time to meet as a team to develop interdisciplinary curriculum or to collaborate and share ideas with other teachers of freshmen. Teachers especially wanted ideas and strategies for dealing with issues of student motivation and parent involvement. One teacher expressed concern about the high percentage of students (in his/her estimation approaching 50% of 9th graders) who refused to do anything outside of class. “Students who will not work independently at all will obviously never succeed in college not matter what other rigorous requirements we put in place.”

Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) found in the LEADS study of study of five California schools highly successful in meeting the needs of low-income students of color, that in addition to allocating several hours each week for collaborative planning and problem solving, fully 7-15 days per year were devoted each year to shared professional learning time. This time was spent on a very intentional approach to developing coherent curriculum, examining student progress, and providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. This is a far cry from the half-day at the beginning of the school year that was the extent of time for FA teachers to work together in planning curriculum. The School Restructuring Network LEADS at Stanford considers this a crucial aspect of policy change that cannot be resolved without substantial investments in school capacity and professional knowledge/skill. They point out that educational systems continue to rely on bureaucratic accountability, or “regulations that prescribe and manage what schools do,” while they need to rely on professional accountability, “which strives to develop knowledgeable educators who can be trusted to make responsible decisions about practice” (p. 19).

Building-Level Support for SLCs

The fifth and final key domain in implementing small learning communities is building-level and district support for SLCs.

Aligning School Improvement and Academic Department Goals with SLC Needs

“SLCs that have the most success with their students are not add-ons to the existing school organization. They are the fundamental building blocks of school organization and the center of school activities. Restructuring schools in this manner depends upon aligning policies and practices across all organizational units. Schools’ improvement

plans—including their provisions for professional development—serve the goals and objectives of SLC programs” (Oxley, 2007, p.83).

A significant challenge in implementing small learning communities has been the necessity of integrating many, and sometimes conflicting, federal, state, and district directives into a coherent school improvement plan. While the Grant Manager position was in existence, many hours were spent establishing and working with Design Teams in the grant schools to align existing structures, groups, and programs with small learning communities. For example, the Instructional Council, a group of teachers, administrators, and parent/community members that makes curriculum decisions at each school in APS, is regularly involved in SLC implementation at the grant high schools. Current district initiatives in literacy and achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) are part of the SLC goals. Finally, the Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS), which is the document outlining overall school improvement goals, specifies small learning communities as the vehicle for achieving these goals.

Aligning academic department goals with the needs of SLCs has not yet occurred. Although both academic discipline-based planning and cross-disciplinary planning are important to the success of small learning communities, the operation of both SLC and discipline-based teams has the potential to create competition, especially for planning time. An English teacher on one of the Freshman Academy teams expressed the opinion that the interdisciplinary planning was fine, but she also needed planning time with the English department to continue to be the best English teacher possible. The task for the schools is to value the contributions of each type of team and to welcome the focus on content knowledge and rigor that the discipline-based teams can provide to the interdisciplinary teams. This will continue to be of major importance as career academies are implemented.

Building Level Support for Professional Development

Professional development should provide a coherent framework for implementing SLC essential practices. As Cohen (in Oxley, 2007) cautions, a variety of school improvement initiatives occurring simultaneously in schools often have different goals, involve different groups, and have weak links to teacher practice. The school professional development plan should directly address student performance needs identified by individual teachers, SLC teams, the EPSS, and AYP performance goals. This is completely compatible with the impetus of SLCs on developing an engaging and authentic curricula, raising standards for student performance, and building community (Christman & Macpherson in Oxley, 2007). It is important for teachers to collaboratively identify these needs and then the administration can provide the support necessary to ensure that appropriate professional development occurs. This might include: providing time for teams to plan together; attending a professional conference or workshop, arranging for a consultant to work with teachers on site, or visiting other high schools with SLCs in APS or other school districts.

Class Schedules and Staffing Adjusted to Strengthen SLCs

Probably the most difficult aspect of implementing small learning communities in large, comprehensive high schools is dealing with the master schedule. The Career Academy Support Network (CASN) indicates that failure to achieve cohort student scheduling and team teacher scheduling is responsible for the most frequent downfalls of SLCs. The benefits of properly implemented small learning communities are many, including a supportive group of teachers and students who know each other well and an academic program that reflects the interests of participants, meets individual student needs, and demonstrates connections between disciplines and between school and the world of work.

For the most part, cohort student scheduling has been achieved in the Freshman Academies at Manzano and Valley High Schools, with the exception of a few students. However, as Career Academies are being implemented over the next few years it is imperative that these students be scheduled in the same manner. *“Research suggests SLCs help to keep students in high school, make it a more positive experience, and boost attendance, grades, and graduation rates”* (Maxwell & Stern in CASN, 2006, p.2). But, *“if students aren't scheduled into the same sections as the other students in their SLC, with a cadre of teachers working together, these benefits are lost”* (CASN, 2006, p.2).

Student Needs for Acceleration or Remediation Met Through SLCs

To make a total commitment to a small learning communities model, teams must be truly heterogeneous. Students with basic math skills should not be placed on one team, but rather equally represented on all teams. ESL students needn't be removed from the classroom for English instruction, but could receive assistance from an ESL teacher in the regular Freshman Academy English class. Occasional ad-hoc groupings of students for special instruction within SLCs is in no way precluded. Administrators can facilitate this change by exploring successful approaches used by other SLCs, selecting feasible ideas to try, and then ensuring that the master schedule and staffing patterns enable this vital change to occur. It is not easy. It represents a fundamental shift in the familiar ways of grouping students in schools, but it is possible, and has been achieved by many schools across the country with very positive results.

Building Level Policies Strengthen Self-Governance

At Manzano, some of the grant funds were used to pay an additional stipend to a small group of teachers to take a leadership role in implementing small learning communities. These teachers, representing both the Freshman Academy and Career Academies, have been meeting regularly for at least two years and have developed the advisory program focus and curriculum as well as the career pathways. This is a positive example of shifting some of the power and responsibility for decision making away from administrators and toward teachers who are more intimately involved in small learning communities. An interesting idea from SLC best practices that has not yet been tried, is assigning all administrators to particular SLCs. Assuming that the SLC teams are handling most of the students' needs, including discipline, administrators would then be available to assume instructional leadership and teaching roles within SLCs.

District Level Support for SLCs

District Policy Supporting SLC Practices

Studies of school districts engaged in restructuring suggest that the district can support the implementation of small learning communities by standardizing policies that support SLC development across all schools (Oxley, 2007). The Albuquerque Public Schools' plan, High School Standards for Redesign, is a blueprint for high school restructuring in four areas: High Standards, Professional Development, Quality Teaching, and Shared Accountability, and provides precisely the type of standardized policy recommended in SLC best practices. Early in the grant, there was little recognition that this plan and the small learning communities grant had common goals; only 4% of FA teachers surveyed had used the High School Standards for Redesign to improve curriculum and instruction. Many teachers believed that the implementation of small learning communities was just another in a long list of educational reform fads. Consequently, part of the initial work of the evaluator and Grant Manager was to communicate to schools that small learning communities are not an isolated initiative, but part of a district, state, and national effort to restructure high schools. Great strides were made in familiarizing key personnel with the High School Standards for Redesign and in facilitating cooperative relationships among the departments involved in achieving this vision.

Self-Governance

For a number of years, the Albuquerque Public Schools has used site-based management in which schools have the autonomy to allocate resources as needed, to determine their curricular and instructional program, to hire their own staff, and to make minor modifications to the school day or year. Although there has been a shift of decision making from the district to the school-level, the schools have not yet shifted this influence over school policy and practice to teachers—which SLC research suggests is a key feature of successfully restructured schools. This goes against the grain of the traditional top-down approach to education management and may be somewhat threatening because it is so different from current practices. In order for this change to occur, it may be necessary for the district to exercise leadership in clarifying expectations and promulgating examples. Another impediment to self-governance is the bussing schedule, which appears to dictate school practice, rather than being responsive to the scheduling needs of schools.

Staffing

The unique program identities and offerings of SLCs create special staffing demands that often run counter to union-negotiated policies on teacher hiring. Across the country, hiring based on seniority has been a barrier to staffing SLCs with the necessary teachers. Some districts have negotiated a teacher's union contract that allows the suspension of seniority requirements if 50% of the staff agrees. Although it is not yet known if this will prove a barrier in APS, it is important to be aware of this potential pitfall.

Professional Development

Appropriate professional development is critical to the instructional innovation necessary to transform our nation's high schools. It is essential that the district support this by providing sufficient funding for at least 10 days of professional development each school year plus common prep periods for all team teachers in Career or Freshman Academies. Professional development for teachers should focus on continuous, high quality opportunities for learning that integrate pedagogy and content and provide opportunities for application, practice, and coaching. Teachers must be engaged in the collaborative development of challenging, interdisciplinary curriculum; rigorous performance assessments; and the continuous analysis of student work. Successful methods for teaching students of different cultures, languages, learning styles, and abilities should be a focus of professional development efforts. In addition, the district must ensure that principals have the skills and knowledge to plan effective professional development, redesign the organization of schools, and manage the complex process of change that is required to effectively restructure high schools.

In the past, the district or school has decided what teachers need and then provided inservice to meet these perceived needs. SLC research suggests a complete reversal in this process in which teachers determine and plan their own professional development based on needs identified in their small learning communities. The district and the schools could facilitate this by ensuring that adequate time is built into the school year calendar for self-selected professional development and by helping teachers locate resources or personnel when requested. It is important to be respectful of teachers as professionals and to empower them to make decisions regarding their own growth. The district needs to continue looking at existing professional development structures, processes, and workshops with a critical eye to determine if they are the best possible way to meet the needs of APS high schools as they restructure.

Flexible Staffing and Budgeting

Currently, student-based budgeting is used to allocate funds to schools in APS, one of the recommended methods for budgeting and staffing that provides flexibility in meeting needs at the school level. However, schools will need to make the shift from previous patterns of resource allocation that support large, comprehensive high schools to those that support small learning community practices such as lower student/ staff ratios, more instructional time devoted to the core curriculum, and sufficient specialists in ESL, special education, reading, etc. to support greater integration. These changes are as necessary at the district level as at the school level (Oxley, 2007).

Results

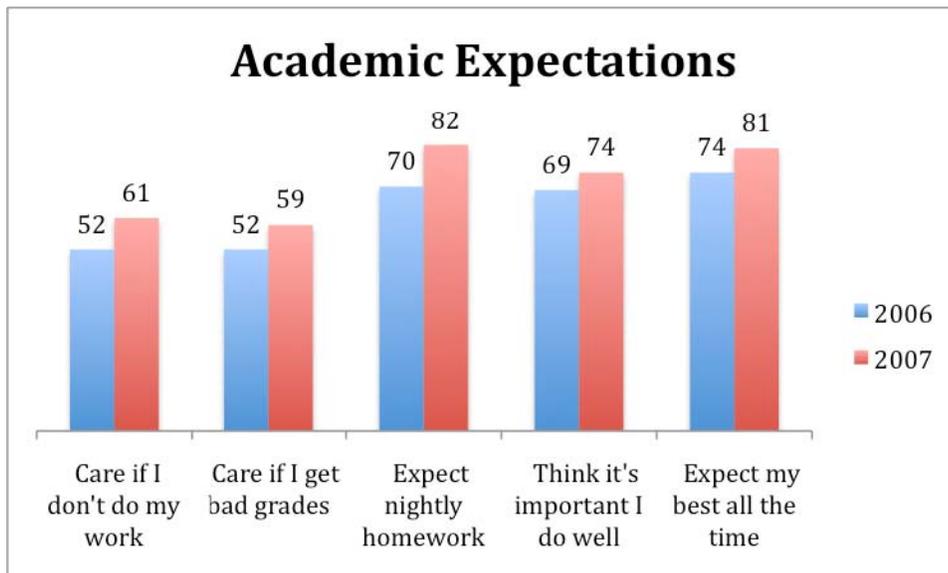
It was expected that the implementation of Freshman Academies would have positive short-term outcomes for students such as increased academic expectations and support, a more personalized high school environment, and greater school and academic engagement. These, in turn, would lead to positive long-term academic outcomes such as improved achievement as measured by grade point average and standards based tests and higher graduation rates. Because of insufficient implementation of small learning community structures and the short implementation time, it was not appropriate to measure long-term academic outcomes for students. However, it was appropriate to measure short-term outcomes using the pre and post administration of the student survey. While the previous section of this report described implementation of Freshman Academies at Valley and Manzano High Schools for two years (2006-08), the results in this section are based on the first year of implementation of the Freshman Academy at Valley High School only. The student survey that was administered to Valley freshmen prior to Freshman Academy implementation in 2006 and after the first year of Freshman Academy implementation in 2007 measured school climate and student attitudes in several areas: teacher academic expectations, academic self-efficacy, and peer support for academics; teacher trust, school attachment, and visibility; school and academic engagement; and peer relations and sense of safety. A copy of the survey is contained in Appendix A.

Academic Expectations and Beliefs

School reform findings indicate that students learn much more when they experience high levels of “academic press” and strong social support (Wasley, 2001). The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL, 2000) explains that this means “communicating a strong message at the school level that academic achievement is one of the primary goals of the school” and “placing a clear focus on mastery of basic subjects, establishing high performance expectations for all students, and carefully monitoring student progress.”

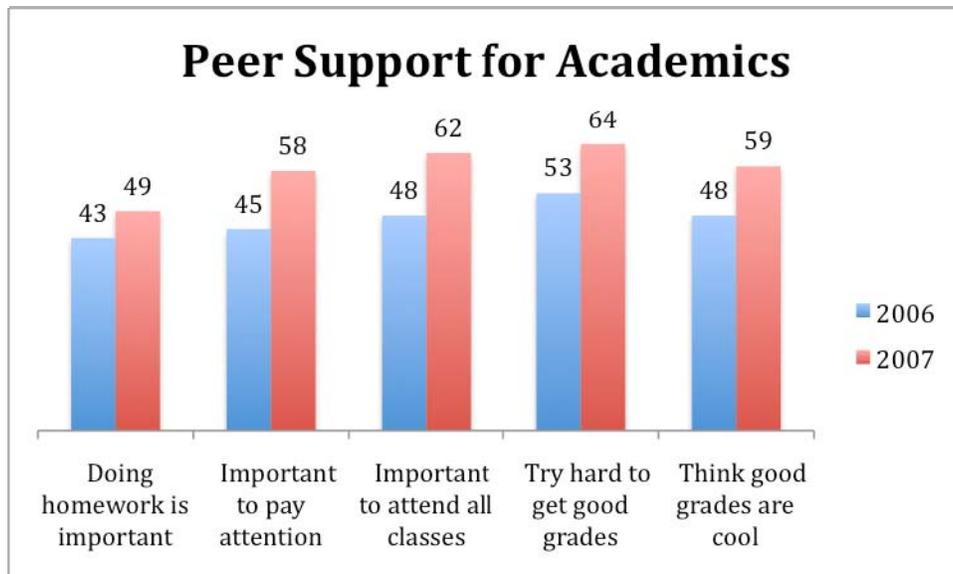
At Valley High School, teachers’ expectations for academic achievement came across “loudly and clearly” to students in the Freshman Academy. Five items comprised the academic expectations scale and the percentage of student agreement increased on all items. Students who participated in the first year of the Freshman Academy at Valley in 2007 rated teacher academic expectations significantly higher than freshmen prior to Academy implementation ($t=2.31$, $df=458$, $p\leq.05$). See Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Percent of Valley High School Freshmen Reporting High Academic Expectations



Students also believed that their peers were more supportive of academics. Five items comprised the Peer Support for Academics Scale and the percentage of students who agreed with each statement increased on all items. See Figure 2 on the next page. Students who participated in the first year of the Freshman Academy at Valley were significantly more likely than the previous year’s ninth graders to say that at least half of their classmates thought it was important to do homework, attend all classes and pay attention. They also thought that they tried hard to get good grades and thought it was cool to get grades ($t= 2.18$, $df=455$, $p\leq.05$).

Figure 2.
Percent of Valley High School Freshmen Reporting Peer Support for Academics



Students’ perceptions of their ability to do difficult work also improved. While prior to FA implementation, only 69% of the ninth graders believed they “*could do even the hardest work in their classes if they tried,*” 77% of ninth graders believed they could after participating in the FA for one year. This was a statistically significant change ($t=2.20$, $df=453$, $p\leq.05$). The remaining three items measuring academic self-efficacy (6, 7, & 12) did not change significantly.

Teacher Trust and Adult Connections

Personalizing the high school environment increases student investment in learning by fostering strong relationships and accountability between students and teachers (Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender, 2008). Students feel known and cared about and trust their teachers to look out for their best interests. Nine items on the student survey measured students’ trust in and comfort with their teachers, including perceptions of teacher fairness, caring and receptivity. The percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with these statements increased on eight of the nine items when comparing Valley freshmen prior to Academy implementation with freshmen who had participated in the first year of the Academy, and two of the increases were statistically significant. There was a significant increase in the percentage of Valley freshmen who reported that their teachers tried to be fair ($t=2.10$, $df=459$, $p\leq.05$) and who indicated that their teachers listened to what they have to say ($t=2.34$, $df=452$, $p\leq.05$). See Table 2.

Table 2. Percent of Valley Freshmen Experiencing Teacher Trust Before and After FA Implementation

| ITEM | Before Academy | After 1st year |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| My teachers keep their promises. | 40% | 43% |
| I feel safe and comfortable with my teachers in this school. | 64% | 69% |
| My teachers listen to students' ideas. | 57% | 64% |
| My teachers try to be fair. | 57% | 65%* |
| When my teachers tell me not to do something, I know they have a good reason. | 57% | 62% |
| My teachers relate subjects to my personal interests. | 32% | 31% |
| My teachers listen to what I have to say. | 54% | 62%* |
| My teachers help me catch up if I'm behind. | 55% | 56% |
| My teachers give me extra help of my schoolwork when I need it. | 62% | 63% |

Two items dealt with student connections to adults at school and while both items showed an improvement, the change was not statistically significant. See Table 3.

Table 3. Percent of Valley Freshmen Experiencing Adult Connections Before and After FA Implementation

| ITEM | Before Academy | After 1st Year |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| I know at least one adult in the school who I would go to for help, advice, or support if I needed it. | 56% | 63% |
| There is no adult at this school that I would trust with my problems. | 50% | 48% |

Visibility and School Attachment

Three items each measured student visibility and school attachment and the results were mixed. A slightly smaller percentage of Freshman Academy students felt people at Valley knew who they were and they also indicated that fewer teachers knew their interests and talents. On the other hand, a significantly larger percentage of FA students

felt they were recognized for their efforts ($t=1.92$, $df=456$, $p \leq .056$). It may be possible that this item is more closely related to academics than visibility. See Table 4.

Table 4. Percent of Valley Freshmen Expressing Visibility Before and After FA Implementation

| ITEM | Before Academy | After 1 st year |
|--|---|--|
| Most people at this school know who I am. | 68% | 64% |
| People at this school recognize me for my efforts. | 33% | 38%* |
| How many teachers know your interests and talents? | 0 19% 1 24% 2-3 36% 3-4 9% 5+ 12% | 0 25% 1 25% 2-3 31% 3-4 10% 5+ 10% |

Three items measured students' feelings of belonging or attachment to school. The percentage of Valley freshmen who agreed or strongly agreed with each item is presented in Table 5, along with statistics from a national study (National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 1995). These results do not show much change, suggesting that the Freshman Academy must be more thoroughly implemented before it impacts students' feelings of attachment to high school.

Table 5. Percent of Valley Freshmen Expressing School Attachment Before and After FA Implementation

| ITEM | Before Academy | After 1 st Year | Compared to National Average |
|--|----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| I feel close to people at this school. | 60% | 57% | 58% |
| I feel like I am part of this school. | 48% | 48% | 57% |
| I am happy to be at this school. | 50% | 59% | 58% |

Summary

While students in the Freshman Academy at Valley perceived significantly higher teacher academic expectations and believed themselves more capable of doing difficult work, they were not more engaged in school and academics. It is unlikely that this can be achieved without substantial revision of the high school curriculum so that it focuses on

topics of high interest and relevance to adolescents, integrates career and technology content, and utilizes highly engaging strategies such as project based learning. The Freshman Academy also improved the level of student trust in teachers, but did not have as great an effect on students' feelings of visibility and attachment. Nor did it significantly change peer relationships or student sense of safety at school. In light of these results, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

Strategies to Increase Personalization

A key feature of highly successful high schools is their degree of personalization, which provides the motivation, support, and accountability for students to succeed (Ancess, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Quint, 2008). The following recommendations are made to improve the degree of personalization in Freshman Academies in APS high schools:

- Place all students in small interdisciplinary teams so that students have the same teachers and classmates for all of their core academic courses and teachers have common prep periods.
- Reduce class size to a maximum of 25 students and the overall pupil load per teacher to between 50 and 100 students. Adjust scheduling so that teachers work with fewer students for longer periods of time. This will require the redesigning of traditional staffing patterns so that more classroom-based personnel are available.
- Create student advisory groups of 15-25 students who meet at least once a week and remain with the same advisor for three to four years.
- Continue to provide teachers with high quality lesson plans and suggestions for advisory activities that address topics such as career exploration, postsecondary educational opportunities, goal setting, motivation, and issues of social and emotional importance to teens. In addition, broaden the focus of advisory so that it systematically organizes counseling, academic supports, and connections with families. Provide the professional development necessary for teachers to comfortably and effectively take on these new roles.

Strategies to Ensure Equity

In spite of two and a half decades of standards-based reform and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, minority and low-income students continue to be adversely affected by our nation's school system (Futrell & Gomez, 2008; Jackson, 2008; School Redesign Network, 2007; Wise, 2008). To proactively address this inequity, the following recommendations are made:

1. Ensure that Freshman Academy teams are truly heterogeneous by carefully adjusting scheduling and eliminating assignment of whole groups of students to a particular team (e.g. students taking AP courses, basic math, ESL, etc.)
2. Eliminate pull out programs and all ability level tracking. Assign teachers with backgrounds in special education, English as a Second Language (ESL), AP and gifted to all teams to meet needs for differentiation within the core team.
3. Actively commit to culturally responsive pedagogy by addressing the institutional, personal and instructional barriers in schools. Utilize the work of such groups as the School Restructuring Network LEADS, Teaching for Tolerance, and the Center for Research on Education, Excellence, and Diversity to implement multicultural teaching that promotes not only respect for, but a true appreciation of, cultural diversity.
4. Create strong partnerships with families through frequent communication (especially when things are going well), a strong advisory program, invitations to examine student work (conferences, portfolios, presentations), and creating conditions that make parents feel comfortable and invite involvement.

Implementing Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum

Rigorous and relevant curriculum is the heart of high school reform. No longer can we afford to teach isolated subjects with little or no connection to future careers. It is essential that as small learning communities are implemented in APS, they truly embrace a complete transformation in curriculum and instruction, or they will be just a new name for high school as usual (Hoachlander, 2008; Jackson, 2008; School Restructuring Network, 2007; Wiggins & McTighe, 2008). To this end, the following recommendations are made:

1. Develop a largely integrated course of studies for the freshman year that is based on topics or themes of high interest to adolescents. Relate curriculum to students' lives, cultural backgrounds and personal interests to increase motivation and engagement.
2. Develop interdisciplinary curriculum that provides authentic learning experiences and multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills applied to real-world problems.
3. Utilize performance assessment and analysis of student work as the basis of teaching and learning.
4. Hold high expectations for all students and provide the support (e.g. additional classes, tutoring, in-class assistance, etc.) to enable students with skills deficits to access the same challenging curriculum. This is especially critical in ninth grade

and may require a change in staffing and funding to reflect this priority (Donnegan, 2008).

Supporting Professional Learning and Collaboration

It will not be possible to achieve any of the above recommendations without a substantial investment in the continuing professional development and learning of teachers and principals (Darling-Hammond, 2008; School Redesign Network, 2007). Although the small learning communities grant provided a starting point, additional sources of funding must be devoted to support opportunities for extensive professional learning and collaboration that differs dramatically from what has occurred in the past. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Provide funding for at least 10 days of professional development each school year to support professional learning and collaboration at the school level.
2. Ensure that professional development provides continuous, high quality opportunities for learning that integrate pedagogy and content, and provide opportunities for application, practice, and coaching. A highly successful model currently in use in APS is the professional development provided through the Teaching American History grant.
3. Engage teachers in the collaborative development of challenging, interdisciplinary curriculum, rigorous performance assessments, and continuous analysis of student work. Include a specific focus on successful methods for teaching students of different cultures, languages, learning styles, and abilities.
4. Ensure that principals and other administrators have the skills and knowledge to plan effective professional development, redesign the organization of schools, and manage the complex process of change that is required to truly transform high schools.

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Appendix A

Freshman Academy Student Survey

Freshman Academy Teacher Survey

Small Learning Communities High School Student Survey, Spring 2006



School: Highland Manzano Valley

Gender: Male Female

Grade: 9th 10th 11th 12th

Ethnicity: American Indian/Alaska Native Asian African American
 Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander White

The first questions are about your experiences in school and in class, and what can be done to improve things.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I usually look forward to school. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 2. I'm glad to get back to school after summer vacation. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 3. I usually look forward to class. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 4. My teachers help me see connections between different classes and subjects. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 5. Sometimes I get so interested in my work I don't want to stop. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 6. I can do better work than I'm doing now. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 7. I am certain I can master the skills taught in my classes. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 8. Most people at this school know who I am. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 9. People at this school recognize me for my efforts. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 10. I can do even the hardest work in my classes if I try. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 11. There is no adult at this school that I would trust with my problems. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 12. If I have enough time, I can do a good job on all my class work. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 13. I wish I didn't have to go to school. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| 14. I know at least one adult in the school who I would go to for help, advice or support if I needed it. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 or 3 | 3 or 4 | 5 + |
| 15. About how many teachers at this school know about your interests and talents? | <input type="radio"/> |

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 16. I feel close to people at this school. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. I am happy to be at this school | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. I feel like I am part of this school. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

RDA/Debra Heath & Jennifer Johns

Please turn over

/ . Gythj4yuiop

Freshman Academy
Team Teacher Survey, April 2008

What subject do you teach in the Freshman Academy? _____

_____ # of Students in your FA team _____ % of Students with all core classes in FA team

1. Teacher Assignment (select one)

- I instruct **½ or fewer** of my total classes in the FA
 I instruct **more than ½** of my classes in the FA
 I instruct all of my classes in the FA

2. Common Planning Time (select one)

- I share **one** common prep period/week with **most** of the FA team
 I share **at least one** common prep/week with **all** of my FA team
 I share common prep with all plus **some extended blocks** (prep + lunch)
 I share common prep plus **several** extended blocks of time

3. Primary Use of Common Planning Time (select one)

- To discuss **individual student needs**
 To discuss **student needs** and plan **some events**
 To discuss **student needs** and plan **interdisciplinary instruction**
 To plan **interdisciplinary curriculum** and **learning activities**

4. Building Space (select one)

- My classroom is **not near any** of the other teachers on my FA team
 My classroom is adjacent to or in close proximity to **one** teacher on my FA team
 My classroom is adjacent to or in close proximity to **all** of the FA teachers.

5. Do you have teachers who are new to your FA team this year?

- No
 Yes (**What impact has this had on your team?**)

6. Interdisciplinary Curriculum (select one)

- My FA students participate in **one** interdisciplinary lesson/project
 My FA students participate in **several** interdisciplinary lessons/projects
 My FA students participate in a **totally integrated** course of study
 My FA students participate in a **totally integrated** course of study organized around **high interest themes** to adolescents, that are relevant to their cultural backgrounds

Please describe below any interdisciplinary lessons, projects or themes in which your FA students participated. Feel free to attach lesson plans, if this is easier for you.

7. Active, Authentic Inquiry (select one)

- My FA students do some independent research
 My FA students regularly engage in independent research
 My FA students regularly engage in research, use multiple sources of information & present conclusions as part of special projects.
 My FA students regularly **generate** research questions, use multiple sources of information and document their work in in-depth, authentic forms.

Please give examples of the type of research your FA students have conducted.

8. Instructional Block (select one)

- My FA classes are **not** scheduled in a block.
 My FA classes are scheduled in a block that is **less than** a half-day
 My FA classes occupy an **unbroken half-day** block of time

9. Has your FA team used this block of time in non-traditional ways? (e.g. combining students or consecutive periods for special projects/activities)

- No
 Yes (**Please describe**)

10. FA Membership: Students

- Students were assigned to this Freshman Academy.
 Students chose to be a part of this Freshman Academy.

Please describe any opportunities 8th graders had to learn about their FA or meet teachers and students in their FA prior to the beginning of their freshman year?

11. FA Membership: Teachers

- I was assigned to this Freshman Academy team.
 I chose to be a part of this Freshman Academy team.

12. FA Schedule (select one)

- Our FA utilizes the **same** schedule as the rest of the school
- Our FA uses the same overall schedule, but **allocates course time** according to student needs
- Our FA **adds** additional instructional time for remedial/honors work or to pursue opportunities outside the regular school day.

13. Special Ed and ESL (select one)

- Special ed/ESL teachers work with these students on their own **separate team**.
- Special ed/ESL teachers are **assigned to FA teams**, but work with these students **outside** of the FA classes.
- Special ed/ESL teachers are **assigned** to FA teams, **help differentiate instruction**, and work with individual students in **inclusive groups** within the FA.
- Special ed/ESL teachers **plan curriculum and instruction** with FA team members and divide students into small, **inclusive groups**.

14. Counselors (select one)

- We **do not** have a counselor exclusive to the FA at our school.
- Our counselor **works exclusively** with the FA at our school.
- Our counselor not only works exclusively with the FA, but also assists with special projects and learning activities.**
- Our counselor is an **integral member** of our FA interdisciplinary team.

15. How did your FA use your advisory time this year?

16. How often did someone from your FA team contact each student's parents this year?

17. Did your team plan any special events to which parents were invited?

- No
- Yes (**Please describe**)

18. What sources of data have you used in your classroom this year to evaluate the progress of your FA students or to make changes in your curriculum? (select all that apply)

- informal observations

- attendance, grades, or credits
- teacher made tests/assessments
- standardized test results
- student feedback
- other

19. Has your FA team collaboratively collected and analyzed any sources of student data?

- No
- Yes (**Please indicate type of data, when collected/analyzed, and how it was used**)

20. Has your FA team worked with school leaders, evaluator, parents, or community members to solicit input and improve practice?

- No
- Yes (**Please describe**)

21. Were you or your FA team required to attend any professional development organized by your school/district this year?

- No
- Yes (**Please list**)

22. Do you attend any professional development of your own choice this year?

- No
- Yes (**Please list**)

23. Did your FA team plan/attend any professional development specific to the needs of your students?

- No
- Yes (**Please describe**)

24. What type of professional development opportunities would be the most beneficial in meeting the needs of your Freshman Academy students?

25. Has the Freshman Academy at your school improved student outcomes? If so, what has improved and why do you attribute this improvement to the FA?

If not, why do you think there have been no improvements?