

Our Path to Success: The “Holmes Way”

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Holmes Middle School is located in the San Fernando Valley area of the Los Angeles Unified School District and provides educational services to a diverse, multiethnic population of 1,504 students. Eighty percent of our students are from the traditionally underrepresented group of minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Through a dedicated school-community collaborative effort, we have taken a school that only 6 years ago was identified as low performing (II/USP status) to a position as one of the top-performing middle schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Holmes has made significant gains in closing the achievement gap over the past 5 years, with our socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ API increasing 163 points compared with that of our White population, which has increased 108 points. Our statewide ranking has gone from a 5 in 2002 to an 8 in 2006. In addition, our statewide ranking compared with that of similar schools has gone from an 8 in 2002 to a 10 in 2005. The following chart shows how far we have come over the last 4 years. Holmes is known in LAUSD as a remarkable place that truly is closing the achievement gap.

Groups	API Score	API Score	API Score	API Score	API Score	Growth Points	AYP English in %		AYP Math in %		2003-05 Growth in %	
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006		03	06	03	06	Eng	Math
All Students	658	710	738	780	795	+137	35.6	53	34	56.3	+17.4	+22.3
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	607	675	714	752	770	+163	27.4	46.7	28	51.2	+19.3	+23.2
Hispanic/Latino	606	668	702	745	770	+164	26.3	45.8	25.8	50.5	+19.5	+24.7
African American	604	668	709	N/A	N/A	+105	25.8	51.1	22.4	48.9	+25.3	+26.5
White	727	771	789	837	835	+108	51.8	65.2	41.7	65.2	+13.4	+23.5
Special Needs							19.4	20.2	15.8	21.3	+8	+5.5
English Learners							26.3	36.9	28.5	45.2	+10.6	+16.7

At Holmes share a common vision of the standards our school must continually strive to meet. To that end, we have “The Holmes Way,” a set of basic tenets to which we refer when evaluating our strengths and weaknesses and refining our goals. The Holmes Way decrees that we shall hold high expectations for all students and that we believe each child is capable of learning.

Program Description

Our initial growth and successful transition from an II/USP school to a high-performing school resulted from four major changes: (1) developing numerous decision-making groups that ensure the active participation of parents and other community reps; (2) redefining the school day and climate; (3) using data to guide our instructional decisions; and (4) a comprehensive professional development program. Our first step was to develop a team of teachers, staff, parents, administration, and community stakeholders to create a Single School Plan (SSP) that aligned with LAUSD’s (LEAP) to identify barriers to learning and set measurable standards-based goals for our action steps. This team visited other schools, adopting ideas that might work for us. We used data as a guide to see what we were doing and where we needed to go.

We continually strategize new ways to enhance our school culture and programs. To establish a uniform behavioral code, we created and instituted The Holmes Way as a schoolwide philosophy. The Holmes Way promotes the following: courteousness and kindness; high standards of appropriate behavior; a safe environment where conflicts are settled in a nonviolent manner; the highest level of academic instruction; the value of a healthy mind and body; and all stakeholders sharing in the

educational decision-making process. This standard measures all our actions. When walking around campus, a visitor can hear students reminding each other, “That’s not the Holmes Way.”

Data analysis drives our instructional program and teaching practices. Information from various sources of data such as API, AYP, and district quarterly assessments in math, language arts, and science allows us to diagnose student needs, monitor student progress, and improve student achievement. We set measurable goals and then direct all monetary and human resources toward student achievement.

Taking Center Stage has helped direct many of our changes. We moved to block scheduling, so 6th graders have one teacher for English/history, one for math/science, and one for PE. They also have a fine arts elective aligned with the accelerated reading program and taught by one of their core teachers. Our 7th and 8th grade students are programmed into grade level interdisciplinary teams. Our master schedule now includes a double-period language intervention program for all low-performing students in English (ELA) and a math skills elective for struggling math students. Special education students are programmed into general education classes as appropriate, supported by teacher collaboration and coteaching models. All EL learners are enrolled in Saturday school to provide additional access to the core content. Teams are housed in close proximity, and each grade level interdisciplinary and core team of teachers has common conference and planning time.

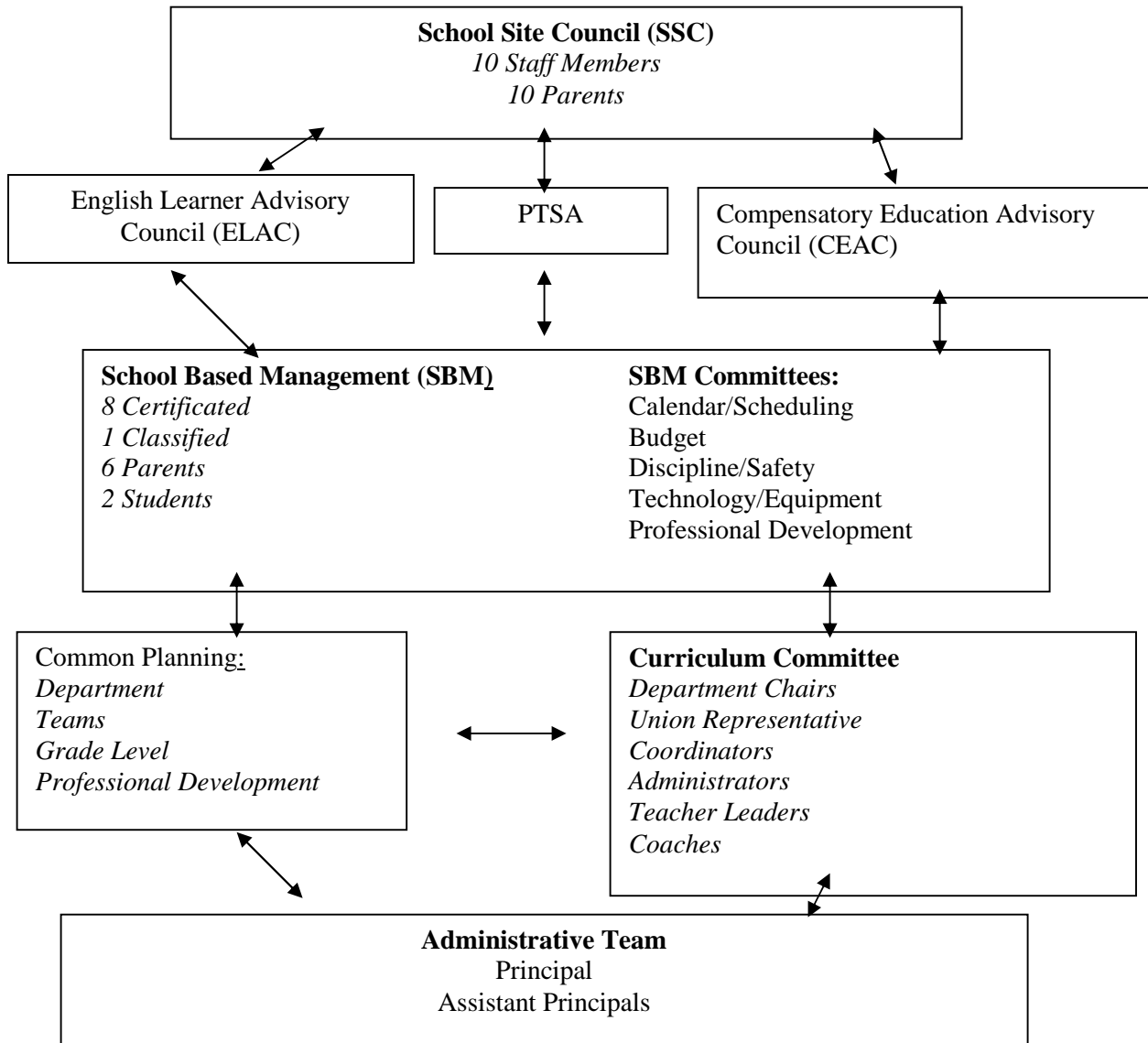
Leadership Structure

The driving force for school programs continues to be the Single School Plan (SSP) that was developed by a team of teachers, staff, parents, administration, and community stakeholders. The provisions in the SSP are discussed at meetings of the School Site Council (SSC), Curriculum Committee, Title I Council, English Learners Council, and School-Based Management Council. All groups have a specific role as required by federal, state, or district mandates and work in collaboration to monitor school programs, review all data, and make suggestions for improvement. As a result of maintaining a highly collaborative and solution-oriented professional approach, our funds are well allocated and readily delegated as deemed necessary by our school team.

The School-Based Management Council (SBM), an optional district council, is a leadership team with representation from parents, teachers, classified staff, and administrators. Standing SBM committees are Calendar, Professional Development, Safety, Equipment/Technology, and Budget. Each committee reviews activities related to their responsibility to maintain a focus on school goals. This shared leadership creates a sense of ownership over school programs among stakeholders.

The Curriculum Committee (CC), a school leadership team comprised of our principal, administrators, department chairs, coordinators, and classroom teachers ensures that necessary supports are in place to facilitate ongoing and continued school growth. As the Curriculum Committee represents all facets of our school, these leaders often catalyze the changes that result in positive growth on our campus. The topics discussed at our SBM committee meetings are reviewed by the CC for targeting during our team and department meetings. This facilitates the transfer of information from councils to teachers and students and maintains the schoolwide focus on needed improvements.

**Holmes International Middle School
Collaboration Structure**



Parent/Community

We understand that our school is not an island. For that reason, we actively seek to gather support from families and community organizations to strengthen our record of success. To encourage parent participation, we have a very active PTSA, and our numerous committees include parent participants. The School Site Council, Compensatory Education Advisory Council, English Language Advisory Council, and School-Based Management Council structures created meaningful alliances with our community. Time is set aside at each council meeting to address parent concerns and garner support for special educational initiatives. At our Parent Institute workshops, parents receive training to help them understand the educational system and better support their child. Additionally, all of our students have planners in which they list their daily homework assignments and which teachers use as a means to communicate with parents. We have frequent parent teacher meetings that allow families the opportunity to meet with all of their children's teachers. Our parent volunteer program thrives due to a school culture that values parent participation.

Quarterly newsletters on topics such as the importance of reading, test-taking tips, and tips for parents to help their child's academic achievement are sent home from the Title I office in both English and Spanish. Back to School, Open House, Family Fun Nights, and our Pancake Breakfast engage parents in our school community. We purchased the Parent Institute program to provide parents with vital information and strategies for supporting their child's educational goals now and in the future. It is offered in English and Spanish in both the morning and evening. Parent conferences held by teams during common conference periods allow teachers to meet with parents as a group.

High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

Holmes teachers understand that we are each individually responsible for our students' achievement. This culture paradigm is continually reinforced each time we analyze our assessment data. At the beginning of each year, we begin our professional development program with a comprehensive analysis of our students' achievement. Using standardized test results, each teacher receives a detailed analysis of each student's overall areas of strengths and weaknesses and overall class data for the students they worked with during the previous year. Teachers reflect on their past practices and pair practices with data from their current students to design lessons and remain cognizant of skills that have historically been most difficult for our students to master. Because of our commitment to continuous growth, we also use assessment data when determining the extent to which we must reevaluate and potentially change direction.

The standards-based curriculum used at Holmes Middle School is comprehensive, challenging, and stimulating. By methodically using instructional guides and periodic assessments aligned to the state standards, we ensure that our students make timely and adequate progress toward meeting those standards. Teachers utilize a variety of methodologies to make the curriculum challenging and stimulating. In classrooms, standards are posted in student-friendly language and parents receive brochures stating grade level standards for reinforcement at home. Samples of exemplary work are posted on the walls in hallways and displayed on bulletin boards in classrooms. Our teachers use strategic teaching techniques and seek to make connections across disciplines in order to engage students in the pragmatic aspects of their education.

Given that all students learn differently, Holmes teachers go beyond the traditional methods of assessing student mastery through tests and quizzes and give students many opportunities to demonstrate mastery. Student learning is assessed by actively tailoring our tools to match our student population. In many classes, our students have the opportunity to display their learning by documenting their growth in portfolios, leading conferences with their parents and teachers, attending family nights, or even creating curricular exhibits. At Holmes, we have a very large population of students with varied disabilities, many of whom require additional supports to master grade level standards. Accordingly, many of our teachers

make accommodations available not only to students with disabilities but to all students who need them, with the goal of encouraging each child to exert his or her greatest effort and maximize the opportunities for academic success.

With a curriculum as rigorous and challenging as ours, many students require additional support to meet our expectations. Fortunately, our staff is dedicated to serving our students, and we offer a number of programs designed to support those who require it. The basis of our support system is our advisory program during 1st and 2nd Homeroom when students meet with their advisory teachers. Students start and end the day with the same teacher and student group. During this time, students are able to seek assistance or clarification from their peers or teachers, regroup, and prepare for either the beginning of another day at school or their transition back home. Second Homeroom ensures that each student has the necessary information and materials to successfully complete assigned tasks at home. We also offer homework help before and after school where students can work with supportive teachers who are experts in their fields. We recently initiated an algebra tutoring program designed exclusively for students who require intensive support for what is typically a very challenging course.

Best Practices

Intervention

We have developed a comprehensive intervention program for our struggling students, identifying and enrolling those who scored below proficient in after school and weekend intervention programs. Our current budget supports our proactive intervention programs starting as early as the fifth week of the first semester. We identified students with potential learning problems early to make sure they are programmed appropriately and receive immediate additional intervention. We evaluate and reflect constantly.

The result of our planning process was the creation of a vision that all students can achieve and meet the academic standards required by students entering high school. Therefore, all students are expected to demonstrate sustained improvement in all academic areas and mastery of the California State Standards. We specifically targeted students at-risk of not meeting grade level standards and not ready for high school.

Intervention is also provided during the school day for underperforming students. Our struggling readers are given intensive support during the 2-period “Language!” program. Underperforming students in mathematics are placed in a second-period math skills class where students are given the individual support needed to be successful. English learners are placed in a double-period language arts class utilizing the High Point curriculum. As English learners transition midyear, we created an English skills class to front-load the lessons and supplement their one-period English class. Students who attend our Saturday school program find that their investment of time and energy is well spent. Paraprofessionals are strategically assigned to assist students and teachers and provide additional assistance. We also have a well established coteaching program that was initially designed to improve the educational outcomes for our students with disabilities.

Teachers at Holmes demonstrate what appears to be an endless willingness to help our students. During break time, lunch, after school, and even on Saturdays, teachers open their doors to offer academic support and to mentor students in need. We understand that some of our students require more intensive, deliberate interventions than others, and we as a staff make sure that those students are offered a higher level of care, compassion, and receptivity than the general population.

GEAR UP and AVID

Our GEAR UP grant and AVID program help to ensure equal access to typically underrepresented minorities. Students receive small-group counseling meetings informing them of the A-G requirements and postsecondary opportunities. AVID provides access to rigorous coursework and the

study skills needed to be successful. Students have access to college campus tours, scholarships, career explorations through career day programs, and parent information meetings. We promote a “college-going culture” at home that includes a college awareness month and college t-shirt days. The college-bound culture generated by these programs has become infectious at Holmes.

Professional Development

Professional development is a team effort at Holmes. Our Professional Development Committee includes administrators and leaders from all departments who plan and execute sessions geared to meet the needs of our professionals. A needs assessment is completed at the end of each year to provide a springboard for topics to be addressed in the future. Each professional development session includes an evaluation for future planning.

Data analysis is one of the cornerstones of our professional development. Teachers review disaggregated data and identify trends and specific areas for improvement. In order to address individual student needs, teachers examine specific data for each class, evaluating last year’s results for the effectiveness of their own instructional program and examining this year’s student data. In addition, teachers are provided charts to display each student’s score for each strand tested in English language arts, math, and social studies and a breakdown of their overall classroom performance to identify strengths and weaknesses of the instructional program. We set measurable goals and then direct all monetary and human resources toward student achievement.

Also through the comprehensive professional development program, we modified our teaching practices, redesigned parent meetings and conferences, and initiated parent education classes. Teachers receive ongoing professional development designed to provide in-depth knowledge of the standards and research-based instructional strategies. As a result, several of the principles of the Institute for Learning—standards-based instruction, setting clear expectations, and accountable talk and academic rigor—are part of the classroom culture and climate. Asset development has also become a cornerstone of our professional development. Specific training is provided in an effort to increase the academic performance of three critical groups: English learners, students with special needs, and socioeconomically disadvantaged. All teachers take responsibility for developing reading and writing skills in all content areas and receive ongoing training on literacy strategies and SDAIE techniques. Holmes developed and implemented an inclusion program; and with the financial assistance of an LRE Grant, all of our teachers were trained in the most effective techniques for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in general education classes.

Staff members attend district and state conferences to stay abreast of educational innovations and present best practices at department meetings. Several staff members have shared their expertise at such conferences as the California League of Middle Schools Conference, national math conferences, GEAR UP conferences, and Title I conferences. As a result of a dynamic professional development program, many teachers are trained in and use the inquiry method for engaging students and Socratic seminars to facilitate critical thinking about complex issues. We have three computer labs, laptop carts, and classroom computer centers that students use for research-based projects. In classes, students participate in labs to build conceptual understanding. Teachers at every grade level utilize collaborative grouping and literature circles, thereby ensuring that all students have the opportunity to interact meaningfully and benefit from their peers.

Common Planning

The teachers at Holmes are provided with ample time to plan our curriculum to meet our students’ needs. We set a bell schedule that allows time for common planning and professional development. On a rotating basis, Holmes teachers have the opportunity to plan with their departments, their teams, and their grade levels to review periodic assessment data, share best practices, develop

concept lessons, and engage in lesson studies. In addition, our master schedule is meticulously designed to meet student needs.

English Language Learner and Students with Disabilities

Nowhere is our commitment to equal access more obvious than among our students with disabilities and our English language learners. Our teachers offer a rigorous, meaningful, and engaging curriculum in which these students make remarkable progress. In fact, in the past 3 years our redesignation rate has far surpassed the redesignation rate of the district.

Our students with disabilities are also offered a highly rigorous and supportive environment. Our coteaching program is in its fourth year, and our students with disabilities have never before shown the level of growth and academic aptitude that they demonstrate now. We have a total of 16 cotaught classes, primarily in the critically important areas of math and English. All coteachers share a common conference period to assist with daily planning and communication. Our special education students with disabilities are able to access all necessary accommodations and modifications as directed by their IEPs, and their teachers constantly seek to develop novel ways to make curriculum meaningful and accessible to all of their students. Teachers collaborate during conference periods and common planning time to share ideas for meeting the needs of students and identifying areas of weakness to address and support across all disciplines. After careful data analysis, we discovered that coteaching as a means of supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities had an overwhelmingly positive impact on our entire student body. Classroom performance and standardized test scores of our underachievers have improved dramatically during the school year.

Recognition

In order to maintain a rigorous atmosphere, we have instituted numerous programs that serve to motivate our students and encourage them to prioritize their goals for academic excellence. Specifically, we have a 3-year culmination policy that requires even our youngest students to maintain good grades, in order to participate in 8th grade culminating experiences. Student progress is carefully monitored and targeted for support and guidance to assure successful attainment of academic skills. We also publicly acknowledge all students who meet the “eligibility” requirements and reward them for their efforts by making special activities available to them. Twice a year, we hold assemblies for our revered Gold, Silver, and Bronze ACE (Achievement Citizenship & Effort) awards in which students who maintain a GPA of at least 2.5 (without D’s, F’s, or U’s) earn privileges ranging from early dismissals for lunch, free quiz upgrades, and perhaps most importantly, a t-shirt that students wear proudly, displaying their hard earned accomplishment. These awards are among the most sought after at our school, and our students and parents have found them extremely motivating.

While we, like many other middle schools, reward students for having superior academic grades, we reward students for other achievements as well. For example, several of our 6th and 7th grade teams offer awards each grading period for students who are bringing up their grades. These awards are especially meaningful because they are distributed to students who often do not earn awards for their academic achievements. We also have the “Holmes Hurrah,” a reward given to students through the course of the day for demonstrating characteristics such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, citizenship, caring, and fairness. Students who earn a Holmes Hurrah are announced weekly on the intercom and publicly acknowledged for their strengths. We focus on asset development by providing a nurturing and supportive environment where student’s strengths and efforts are recognized.

Cocurricular Activities

To expand student interest, there is a vast selection of cocurricular activities offered to students. The drama program engages students with an interest in performing arts, while our stage crew students

work diligently at our school performances. We also have a performing dance team; a choir which has created and distributed several professionally developed CDs; a softball and basketball club; as well as a yearly track meet. During lunch time students participate in an intramural sports program organized by grade levels. Our Environmental Club reinforces students' interests in ecology, while our Bug Club exposes interested students to the life cycle of the collembolan bug. Inside Out is another performing arts program with an emphasis on building trust teamwork. This program is unique in that we actively recruit our most needy, often alienated, students to participate in what has proven to be life changing.

Community Service Program

Holmes implemented a plan that includes 5 hours of community service as a part of the requirements to participate in 8th grade activities. It is the purpose of this program to foster active participation in community service, encouraging students to make a difference in the lives of others and feel the joy of giving back to their community and country. Our students have been engaged in such school-sponsored activities as beach and park clean-ups, neighborhood clean-ups, Operation Gratitude, tutoring, assisting teachers in classrooms, and organizing a car wash to raise money for various charities.

Future Plans

The Schools to Watch School—Taking Center Stage (STW—TCS) self rating is a powerful tool that we will continue use to assess programs and target areas for improvement. At the start of this year, teachers and key representatives for other stakeholder groups will complete the STW—TCS school self rating as a tool for reflection and growth. The following are some specific goals that we have set:

Academic Excellence

While the area of academic excellence is one of our strengths, we will continue to focus our efforts to provide a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and set high expectations for our students. At the start of each year, we will review our API and AYP data and identify strengths and weaknesses, set our goal, and target specific student needs for the year. After each district-mandated periodic assessment, departments will meet by grade level to discuss assessment results, share best practices, and address areas of need. Our professional development will highlight specific strategic techniques to improve student engagement in classrooms. Teachers will choose a lesson and engage in lesson study. Teachers, administrators, and parents will attend state and district conferences to stay abreast of educational innovations to compliment our curricular program.

Our district-mandated periodic assessment program has inhibited our ability to implement thematic connections across disciplines. During the next year, one of the focuses of professional development and team time will be to develop interdisciplinary activities.

Developmental Responsiveness

We will work to build more personalization by creating small learning communities. We will discuss the possibility of looping. Vertical teaming will expand beyond our International Humanities Magnet, an integration program, and School for Advanced Studies, a program designed to meet the needs of high achieving and gifted students.

We will increase our after school clubs and elective offerings in order to provide students with a well-rounded educational experience.

We put into place a community service requirement for our 8th grade students for the 2006–07 school year and will expand it at all grade levels in the next year.

This year, a new district algebra program in the 8th grade, coupled with a district class size reduction in math and English, has created some gaps in our teams. We will spend the year discussing

alternatives that will better meet the needs of our school community by being true to our teams. Our goal is that in fall of 2007 8th grade teams will serve 130 students.

Social Equity

Our belief that all children can learn will continue to be a driving force on campus. We will keep our vision of The Holmes Way in the forefront as we make decisions. This year we have funded a new position, a community representative who will help us build liaisons with parents and the community. We are planning to have a community fair that will inform parents about school initiatives and include displays of the health and safety resources available to them in the fall.

A goal of our Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) is to ensure that each student has the opportunity to experience a curricular field trip. In the past, our magnet students received several opportunities for field trips while some students had none. This year, all students will experience an academic field trip.

Each year we will increase participation in our AVID program. This year we added a 7th grade AVID elective class. We will train a 7th grade team to provide a core for these students. In addition, we are looking to expand to all three grade levels in the future. AVID strategies are strategic teaching techniques that we will promote during our professional development.

As part of our GEAR UP, we will continue to increase our college awareness program. We will increase the number of students visiting various colleges, provide parent training that focuses on the A-G requirements, and increase the number of students enrolled in the one-year algebra course.

Organizational Structure and Processes

In organizational structure and processes, we plan to improve articulation by building a partnership with our feeder elementary schools and receiving high schools. Time will be devoted to collaboration between teachers of various disciplines. Vertical teaming will allow teachers to target specific student needs and focus our team efforts. We will start with the elementary school across the street from us and branch out to other elementary schools and then high schools.

Although communication and engagement of all stakeholders is difficult with such a large school community, we will continue to collaborate to create avenues to ensure stakeholder voice.

Resources

AVID www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/avidgen.asp
Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college preparatory program for students in the middle who are often economically disadvantaged and underachieving.

GEAR UP www.castategearup.org/
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs
1100 11th Street, Suite 10, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 551-1757

High Point 6-12 www.hampton-brown.com/Default.aspx
National Geographic School Publishing
Firestone Business Park 340, El Camino Real South #36, Salinas, CA 93901, 1-800-333-3510

LANGUAGE! The Comprehensive Literacy Curriculum www.sopriswest.com/contact_us.aspx
Sopris West, 4093 Specialty Place, Longmont, CO 80504, (303) 651-2829 or (800) 547-6747

Parent Institute for Quality Education www.piqe.org/
4010 Morena Blvd.#200 San Diego, CA 92117, (858) 483-4499,

Taking Center Stage www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/mg/tcs.asp
This 2001 publication is designed to help California's educators successfully implement standards-based education for middle grades students. It provides clear recommendations on how schools can align standards, assessment, accountability, and curriculum to ensure that all students meet grade level content standards. Elementary and high school publications are also available.

Technology Resources/Contacts

Action Lab Paxton/Patterson, John Waltemeyer- Senior Educational Consultant, 714-305-0767
jwaltemeyer@verizon.net

Carnegie – Bridge to Algebra www.carnegielearning.com/products_bridgetoalgebra.cfm
(district funded)

Compass Learning www.compasslearning.com
We use the Odyssey curriculum for middle schools. (Beyond the Bell funded).

Piano Lab-Equipment www.m-audio.com/
MAudio and others. (grant/school funded)

Robotics www.lego.com

Smart Boards It is important to go through a vendor that will either apply for or help you fill out the grant for Smart Boards. Pricing is different for each school.

Vantage – Writing Online www.vantage.com www.gomyaccess.com
(district funded, partially school funded)