

Appendix XXII: 2013-2015 School Year Changes and Strategies

Perceived factors that contributed to the dramatic academic growth seen in 2013-14 and 2014-15 include a monumental cultural shift emphasizing an “urgency to significantly improve” with shared responsibility to make this happen; strategically advancing the mission of implementing Common Core State Standards, instruction and assessments; a commitment to high expectations and excellence for both students and staff; a focus on results using data-driven decision-making to drive instruction; use of a continuous cycle of improvement; focused-targeted professional development; increased academic rigor, curriculum refinement; the adoption of research/evidence-based standards-based curricular resources aligned to common core state standards; more time for planning, reorganized time for student learning; and increased use of mentors, tutors and volunteers targeting low performers.

Several new key strategies were used to accelerate academic growth. They included:

- The monitoring of student progress in 6-8 week cycles using STAR Reading and Math assessment;
- Weekly implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) to analyze data, monitor student progress and plan for differentiation/intervention – Math PLC (2013-14) Literacy PLC (2014-15) were designed to be professional development modules. Staff met after school every other week for the entire school year to develop a common and deeper understanding of the common core “shifts” in Math and ELA instruction and to collaborate on the best ways to make these “shifts” happen school-wide;
- Weekly classroom observations/walk-throughs by administrative team providing immediate feedback;
- Hired a full time Math specialist to work with students and teachers - adopted a school-wide core k-8 standards-based common core aligned math curriculum (Investigations for k-5 and CPM3 for 6-8), provided additional professional development for teachers through the Math PLC;
- Recommitted to initial work with the Common Ground for Common Core Plan, submitting a 2 year plan to the Department of Education with more specific objectives and strategies in instruction and assessment.

Significant changes were also made to the structures that support instruction. They included:

- Increasing the length of the school day and reorganizing the day to allow for more instructional time in core content and collaborative planning time for staff;
- Instituting flexible grouping in Math and Reading based upon STAR data results;
- Instituting grade specific classrooms instead of existing multi-age classrooms;
- Eliminated middle school recess and added an enrichment class allowing for both small group interventions and elective classes;
- Mandatory summer school for failing students;
- A partnership with Communities in Schools to implement a 21st century grant, targeting lowest performing students with more individualized academic time on task through the use of tutors, mentors, volunteers, after school STEAM program (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) and the development of a special learning academy during the spring break.
- At the end of the 2013-2014 school year twelve staff including eight classroom teachers, two special education teachers, a psychologist and a behavioral support staff member resigned, leaving the opportunity for the hiring of new staff who were committed to the

- changes in direction occurring at CCS.
- In the spring of 2014, a new technology manager was hired to perform a school-wide technology audit, upgrade our technology system including access to and increased use of technologies (including blended learning) and transition to Schoology, the newest state-wide educational learning platform.

Based on DCAS scores, two sub-groups, African American and low income students continue to lag behind in their performance and are not moving forward with the same pace of improved performance as all other students. During the summer of 2014 The Response to Intervention process for low performing students was revised. Staff continue to receive focused year round professional development in the use of differentiated instructional strategies, learning styles and awareness training to address the development of cultural proficiency.