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Reward Schools Case Study Project

Castleberry High School

Castleberry ISD

May 2015

Introduction and Context

A SNAPSHOT OF CASTLEBERRY HIGH SCHOOL

2013-2014 demographics:

- 858 students
- Grade span: 9th-12th
- 79% of the students Economically Disadvantaged (i.e., eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch)
- 7% English language learners
- 8% Special Education
- 18% Student mobility rate
- 73% Hispanic
- 23% White
- 2% African American

In 2013-2014, the state accountability ratings were:

- Met Standard on all 3 Indices (Student Achievement, Student Progress, and Closing Performance Gaps)
- Distinction Designations in Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps

Castleberry High School (CHS) is in Castleberry ISD, a suburban district in Fort Worth. The CHS principal, Dr. Julie Davis, was named as the high school's new principal in Fall 2012 and is now in her third year. During her tenure, Dr. Davis and the CHS faculty and staff have worked tirelessly to establish high academic and behavioral expectations for both students and educators. These clear and consistent standards have been especially important, as CHS has experienced an annual increase in student enrollment over the past three years.

The culture of excellence is reflected in the clean hallways, meticulous grounds and landscaping, posters, notices, and messages posted on hallways throughout the building that all convey expectations of academic achievement and success beyond high school. Cabinets are adorned with an impressive display of trophies and plaques earned by the highly successful band program. A new library and computer center, designed with significant student input, is also nearing completion. The overwhelming impression that a visitor gets when walking around CHS is that they have high expectations for student success on campus and beyond.

In order to learn more about what makes CHS the Reward School it is today, the following report will focus on the Texas Education Agency's Critical Success Factors (CSFs), which provide the underlying theory of action guiding the Reward Schools case study project. The findings below are presented in terms of the CSFs.

Based on principal and teacher leader interviews, as well as focus groups with teachers and staff, the following CSFs were particularly evident and strong at Castleberry High School:

- **Critical Success Factor 1: Improve Academic Performance**
 - **Critical Success Factor 2: Use of Quality Data to Improve Instruction**
 - **Critical Success Factor 5: Increase Family and Community Engagement**

Critical Success Factor 1 - Improve Academic Performance

All of the case study participants discussed the following schoolwide strategies:

- A transparent planning process
- Rigor, relevance, and relationships
- Educational technology

A transparent planning process. The administration and staff from both district and the high school have worked closely together to craft policies and processes that ingrain high expectations for academic and behavioral performance in the school's culture. The CHS leadership team, faculty and district leaders, including the Superintendent's Cabinet and the Board of Trustees, spent many months developing and refining the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP) for the upcoming school year. All staff are expected to give input at some point in the process. Planning and review sessions include small cross-curricular groups, one-on-one reviews and whole group discussions. The process is designed with the intent to align daily processes to district and campus goals for student performance and growth. In general, the CIP development process follows this pattern yearly:

May – last faculty meeting of the year

- Faculty and campus leadership review the current year's CIP and conduct a needs assessment of all areas in the CIP, including academic performance, safe schools, discipline, etc. The entire faculty provides input during the review process.

July – CHS leadership team planning session

- Campus leadership team includes principal, assistant principals, core department chairs, fine arts, CTE, diagnostician, counselor and girl's athletic director.
- The review includes, but is not limited to:
 - Campus needs assessment
 - Discipline report
 - Students, parents, staff surveys
 - Student attendance
 - Technology expectations
 - Annual family engagement plan
 - Failure rate

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"...the key is to live and breathe the CIP! We use it at every faculty meeting, leadership meeting, and site-based decision-making meeting. We report on growth monthly – growth on the goals specified in the CIP. We review the technology plan, family engagement plan, etc. It helps you to stay focused if you address all of them."

– Principal Davis

Late July/early August – Presentation to the Superintendent's Cabinet

- Principal receives feedback in August
- September – CIP submitted to the Board of Trustees

Rigor, relevance, and relationships. Beyond a robust and transparent planning process, CHS' primary strategy for improving academic performance is to increase expectations of rigor, relevance, and relationships from both staff and students and to be clear about what those expectations would look like. CHS administrators conduct frequent and thorough reviews of faculty lesson plans in order to ensure that content is taught at all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy

and that materials adequately address the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). In addition, CHS invite both district staff and peer teachers on site to periodically observe teachers and log the types of questions asked of students and the rigor of those questions. At CHS, the type and complexity of questioning strategies are key drivers for deepening students' understanding and comprehension of the material and preparedness to graduate and matriculate to their life after high school.

CHS leadership and staff are committed to forging and maintaining strong individual relationships with their students as a way to keep students engaged in learning. Dr. Davis and members of the focus group acknowledged that many students are growing up in difficult circumstances that could easily interfere with school. As one teacher said, "Many students endure a lot outside of school, but you may never see it. They just keep showing up and doing what they need to do." Teachers and the administration have made it a priority to strengthen their individual relationships with students in order to provide ongoing support and encouragement. Each faculty member is assigned a group of 20 students for what CHS calls, Mentor Classes, which meet once a week throughout the year. Mentors also include staff members who do not teach. During the mentor classes, the teacher and students chart their grades and goals, identify what to change to improve grades, and focus on digital citizenship issues (i.e., how students use the internet and information technology to engage in society, politics, and government participation). This provides students with another adult who is focused on their progress and growth. CHS also has mentor groups or study halls that are focused on testing strategies, specific subjects (e.g., English, Math, Science) or test preparation. Mentor groups offer an additional 30 minutes of support, which lets the students know that the faculty truly cares about them.

Educational Technology. CHS places significant emphasis on the relevance of the material presented in classes and especially digital learning. The district provides educational technology staff to train teachers to imbue the use of technology in lessons and student assignments. Dr. Davis bases her support on the book *Digital Leadership*, which has helped her to ensure that technology is infused in all courses. In her first year, Dr. Davis focused on and provided training to staff on blended learning. All faculty received training on what blended learning is and what it looks like. In her second year, Dr. Davis focused on getting the teachers to use technology as a student-learning tool, not just an instructional tool. Now in her third year, it is common to see students using technology to demonstrate mastery of particular topic through PowerPoint or online web applications. At a minimum, she and the staff expect for students to be able to appropriately use technology tools to gather information, present material, and cite their sources. This is possible, because all students in all grades have netbooks to use in class and for homework. In addition, CHS endorses a BYOD – bring your own device – learning environment where students can augment the school's technology with their own hardware.

Critical Success Factor 2 - Use of Quality Data to Improve Instruction

We asked the principal, teachers, and staff to describe how they collect, analyze, and use data to improve instruction. They mentioned the following strategies:

- Triangulating multiple data sources
- Data ownership and collaboration

Triangulating multiple data sources. Data analysis is deeply embedded into CHS' professional and academic culture for administration, teachers, and students. The campus and district leadership analyze STAAR data to develop campus improvement plans and monitor performance. The leadership teams also utilize heat maps (data visualizations) through Eduphoria tools, such as Aware. CHS staff and leadership compare first six-week curriculum based assessments (CBA) to previous year STAAR results and also compare district benchmarks to STAAR results and CBAs. CHS incorporates a series of benchmark test administrations into its schedule throughout the year to both prepare students for the test-taking experience and to assess progress towards goals throughout the year. The data is used to identify students in need of additional help in specific subjects as well as identify particular curriculum standards that are not being taught successfully. Based on performance on the benchmark tests, which are created using items from test banks of released items aligned with curriculum standards, the administration identifies students in need of additional support and engages them in the extended day program or other targeted instruction and intervention. Data use is incorporated in every subject, including electives and non-core courses.

Data ownership and collaboration. Teachers keep spreadsheets to identify which students have and have not passed specific classes, district and state assessments in each subject, or individual TEKS standards. They then work within CHS Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to spiral this feedback into lesson plans and target intervention strategies for particular students. CHS teachers regularly include students when reviewing spreadsheets and in classroom discussions that break down performance by test item. CHS implemented an initiative to train students on the smart goal process in 2013-14. Through their mentor classes, students keep charts on their performance every three and six weeks and learn to write goals for themselves. This is a way to teach students to focus on continuous improvement. According to Dr. Davis, this is a key strategy for keeping everyone focused on growth.

BEST PRACTICE

Teachers include students in discussions about why large numbers of students missed a given item (e.g. thrown off by a vocabulary word) and why one answer is more correct than another. Teachers report overhearing students discuss performance issues highlighted by data discussions, even though students don't always understand that they are paying attention to data.

Critical Success Factor 5 - Family and Community Engagement

Staff described multiple ways they connect with student families in an effort to improve family and community engagement.

Multiple ways to connect. It is often difficult to engage parents and families of high school students. This is true at CHS and is made more complex by the number of parents who work multiple jobs and have limited time to engage on campus. While both administration and teachers acknowledge that there is room for improvement with parental engagement, they also feel good about the progress that has been made over the past three years.

CHS consistently experiences high engagement among band and athletic boosters, but as with many high schools it is more difficult to engage parents of other students. Dr. Davis and her staff have identified a variety of methods to engage parents, including but not limited to:

- An annual community walk where staff walk the neighborhood and place door hangers with lists of school activities and events from October through the end of the school year
- Parents University one night per year where parents can attend up to four 30-minute sessions per event with classes for parents on topics such as financial aid for college, financial planning for college, making healthy choices for the family, and understanding state education policy
- A school newsletter each six-week period
- Regular Coffee with Counselors sessions
- Parent events in conjunction with their feeder middle school
- Movie nights where the community comes to campus

Dr. Davis also engages representatives from local 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education to assist with Parent University. Teachers are required to call parents about grades every three weeks, and parents have online access to grades, attendance, and behavior. The last few summers, CHS has provided breakfast and lunch every day during the summer free of charge to all students, and summer school classes are scheduled around delivery of those meals.

Summary

While CHS is proud of what they have accomplished together, they are far from satisfied. Dr. Davis indicated that she has targeted specific areas that need continued attention and improvement. Parental involvement is still a struggle, even though it has improved. She also wants to improve postsecondary readiness activities. This year, CHS paid for the PSAT exam for all 10th grade students as a way to familiarize and prepare them for the ACT and SAT tests and ultimately increase the participation rate for college entry tests. Dr. Davis expects to increase participation in Advanced Placement (AP) classes and increase AP exam scores, especially by minority and economically disadvantaged students whose scores are typically low. Finally, Dr. Davis plans to increase participation in the extended day program (i.e. one hour after school) that helps students with their academics. These refinements will build off of and strengthen CHS' professional processes and culture of academic excellence.