

La Tierra Community School  
Community Memorandum - August 18, 2014  
Academic Program, Data, School Grade

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) recently released school grades. La Tierra Community School went from having a B grade to having a D. The purpose of this document is to clearly explain how the State derives its schools grades, the state of growth at La Tierra Community School, the contributing factors that gave us the current mark that we have been assigned and the learning growth that we are experiencing and tracking in our classrooms and school.

When giving a school a grade, the ADE must first have two year of data. Meaning, a class/cohort of students must have taken the Arizona Instrument for Measuring Standards (AIMS) assessment two years in a row. 50% of a school grade is based on a school's demonstrated overall growth from one year to the next (including the specific growth of the bottom 25% and the growth of the school's English Language Learners) and the other 50% includes the actual performance of each student.

As a fledgling school, La Tierra Community School has very little longitudinal data from which to derive its school grade. That is a significant factor affecting our swing in grades this year.

In spring of 2012 our 8 students who were in third grade took the AIMS assessment. We had a 4th and 5th grade class that year, however, the 4th and 5th grade was operating as a private school and they were not required to take the AIMS. Therefore, the 2012 third grade class became the first group of LTCS students to take the AIMS.

In spring of 2013, the former 3rd grade class of 2012 took the AIMS again as 4th grade students. This was the first year we had a class take the AIMS for the second time, becoming the first and only class from which ADE could fashion our entire school grade. This class comprised of 12 students. 12 students in the 2013 4th grade class gave LTCS a school grade of a B. The demographics of that class included 11 children considered average learners and one child with a Special Education Learning Challenge. In 2013 our 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade class all took the AIMS assessment.

In spring of 2014, the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade students all took the AIMS assessment. The 4th, 5th, and 6th grade classes added to the longitudinal data of our school and the amount of students factored into our school grade rose to 36 students. Of the 36 students taking the AIMS in 2014, 9 of our students have Special Education Learning Challenges or are receiving interventions for learning challenges outside of Special Education, 27 are average to above average learners. With the increase in the student count and the increase of learning challenged students within that count, our overall AIMS performance percentage of proficient or advanced learners decreased.

Data points to consider (*the percentages below are based on overall averages*):

- In 2014 - 75% of the 36 La Tierra Community School students received a grade of proficient or advanced in Reading and Math.
- In 2014 - 25% of the 36 La Tierra Community School students received a grade below proficient in Reading and Math.
- In 2014 - 98% of our students who did not reach proficient were on the verge of passing by receiving scores of "approaching" proficient in Reading and Math.
- In 2014 - Only 2% of the 36 La Tierra Community School students tested "fell far below" in Reading and Math.
- In 2013 - 92% of the 12 La Tierra Community School students received a grade of proficient or advanced in Reading and Math.
- In 2013 - 8% of the 12 La Tierra Community School students received a grade of approaching proficient in Reading and Math.

Through reviewing the data with a representative from ADE, we were told that because our school is young and the population is fluctuating, our data will *not* demonstrate a clear picture of the integrity and consistency of our academic program. Looking at the data above it is clear, using the states system for determining a school grade, why our school grade went from a B to a D. We decreased our overall proficiency from 92% to 75% - both of which are commendable percentage rates of proficiency, however, it was a decrease (50% of our grade is based on this increase or decrease). And students scoring in the bottom 25% went from the bottom 25% being comprised of mostly proficient learners, to all learners either approaching proficiency or falling far below (another contributing factor determining 50% of our school grade). As we continue to move forward, grow a middle school program, and gather data to demonstrate growth as a school, the fluctuating student population will significantly affect our school grade. It will take a handful of years for our data to streamline. In order

to maintain a more accurate pulse on the effectiveness of our learning programs it is important to understand the programs in place at La Tierra.

#### Accountability:

In the 2013-2014 school year (SY14) La Tierra students in grades K-6 participated in Compass Learning Odyssey Benchmark assessments. The assessments are aligned with the Arizona State Career and College Readiness Standards (AZCCRS). Student performance on the Odyssey Learning Benchmark assessments is measured according to grade level student performance, as students progress to meet developmental level (DL) benchmarks. We collect data to discover students' individual strengths and challenges, whole class performance, and whole school performance as well. We also review data to report our findings to the Arizona State Charter Board where we report the average percentage of students achieving proficiency by meeting or exceeding grade level standards. La Tierra Community School aggregates data from fall testing the first month of school, as well as winter and spring benchmark assessments in both mathematics and language arts/reading (ELA). Our data inquiry team reviews data after each benchmark assessment window to look for longitudinal data trends and to discover the average percentage of student proficiency by grade level, the successes of the lowest performing 25% of students in each grade level, the average growth percentage per grade level, and the average growth percentage of the lowest 25% of students in each grade level in both ELA and mathematics. Our SY14 data demonstrates that, as a whole school, La Tierra Community School students demonstrated an average of 24.08% growth from fall to spring in ELA and an average of 23.79% growth from fall to spring in mathematics. The lowest 25% of La Tierra Community School students achieved an average of 26.86% growth in ELA and 25.86% growth in mathematics. This is significant and commendable growth in all areas. Data from benchmark assessments is used consistently to inform instruction to further develop differentiated curriculum, focused intervention groups, to accelerate our above average learners, as well as to project our achievement on the AIMS and Stanford10 testing.

#### Curriculum:

La Tierra Community School implements a curriculum that incorporates Expeditionary Learning pedagogy and is derived from, and specifically aligned with, Common Core State Standards and Arizona Academic Standards for content (science and social studies). The process for curriculum development involves ongoing Professional Learning Community (PLC) commitment to; the creation, revision and enhancement of curriculum through the consistent analysis of student data, developing and implementing authentic ongoing assessments within the regular classroom, formal student performance benchmark testing, a strong commitment to professional development with an emphasis on using data and assessments to develop engaging differentiated learning experiences, consistent collaboration with the school's Expeditionary Learning consultant, and strategic planning efforts. La Tierra's PLC meets for professional development every Friday for 6 hours. Our faculty is committed to:

- Developing project based, cross-curricular, vertically aligned thematic units of study/expeditions.
- Reviewing and implementing school-wide curriculum maps and pacing guides for mathematics, aligned with the CCSS and Everyday Mathematics (K-5) and Engage New York Mathematics (6-8) curriculum.
- Developing, identifying and adopting supplemental materials for a wider, deeper model of learning in mathematics - enriching our curriculum.
- Developing and implementing school-wide curriculum maps and pacing guides for English language arts, aligned with CCSS and vertically aligned kindergarten through eighth grades.
- Using pre and post assessments, as well as benchmark data, to develop flexible intervention groups for small group instruction (based on individual needs) in both math and English language arts.
- Common protocols that are vertically aligned and developed to establish common language throughout the grades.
- Reviewing aggregate data consistently to determine areas of intervention support.

#### Instruction:

La Tierra Community School teachers are required to turn in lesson plans bi-weekly. All teachers follow their pacing guides, curriculum maps and expedition plans/modules to develop authentic daily lesson plans for their classrooms that are tied to Arizona State Common Core Standards. All teachers use Planbook.com as a common lesson-planning template and must include Arizona State Common Core State standards in their lesson plan books. These are monitored by the director and reviewed for feedback in bi-monthly meetings between the director and individual faculty members. Every faculty member meets individually with the director every other week. This is an opportunity to discuss pop-in observations, brainstorm expedition plans, share feedback, review classroom data and stay on track with the ongoing learning happening in all classrooms. La Tierra implements a formal evaluation system in which all faculty are formally observed three times a year. This process includes a pre-conference to discuss the objectives and learning targets of the lesson to be observed, the observation and a post-conference for instant feedback. On an informal basis the director does pop-in observations and is

often participating in learning in the classrooms. All faculty members, along with board members and some community stakeholders are also involved in a strategic planning process which includes the development of and implementation of a three year Strategic Action Plan. A specific action is devoted to the development and ongoing adaptation and growth of the school's curriculum and instructional methods.

#### Assessment:

La Tierra Community School is currently using Tyler Technologies, Galileo online system comprehensive assessment system that includes the implementation of benchmark assessments to discover all students knowledge/proficiency (in their specific grade level) of the Arizona State Common Core Standards of Math, ELA and Writing (we also test science to 4th & 8th grade students) three times a year (fall, winter, spring). We collect and review data in order to discover trends in learning, areas of need, and to demonstrate student growth. La Tierra also benchmark tests all students using Dibels assessment program for reading fluency. Students participate in formal Dibels assessments in the fall, winter, and spring. As a faculty, we are committed to the depth of data we receive from the Galileo online system and Dibels fluency assessments. We consistently review student scores to adapt curriculum, develop intervention groups, determine strengths and weaknesses in our instructional effectiveness, identify high-risk student groups based on standards proficiency, to determine the individual needs of our students and to create progress-monitoring assessments for students in need.

Not only does La Tierra use summative assessments, we are consistently creating authentic rubrics to guide our students to develop high quality work products. Through our PLCs we are consistently collaborating to develop common writing rubrics that are vertically aligned and differentiated by grade. We have a learning protocol committed to long term learning targets, as well as daily and weekly learning targets. These objectives for learning front-load the students with clear expectations for learning. Students know the purpose for learning and their long term learning goals. Through the ongoing commitment to assessment for and of learning, our benchmarking and assessment data and analysis, we are able to more genuinely adapt to meet the needs of all learners at La Tierra Community School.

#### Professional Development:

La Tierra Community School Professional Development Plan is aligned with teacher professional growth objectives, the Strategic Action Plan, and informed by student data. The school year 2014-2015 has been devoted to integrating science standards across the curriculum, integrating arts into our educational model, and the continued charge of creating formative assessment tools and using summative and formative assessments to inform instruction and to develop purposeful differentiation in our classrooms. Every faculty member will participate in weekly professional development throughout the 2014-2015 school year. La Tierra closely collaborates with our Expeditionary Learning school designer (consultant) to implement authentic and purposeful professional development onsite. All faculty also participate in at least one off site Expeditionary Learning intensive professional development training each year. The professional development intensives are specific to reading, writing and math and include; a commitment to the rigor and shifts of the common core, using assessment to inform instruction, how to give effective feedback and deepening an understanding of Expeditionary Learning pedagogy.

All of the efforts delineated above have added to the continued learning growth of our student body.

In completing our annual Comprehensive needs assessment La Tierra has a rigorous process by which we consider:

#### Grading and Reporting:

La Tierra Community School has a succinct grading system that is aligned with the Common Core and Arizona State Standards for learning. Our academic achievement key is as follows:

<b>Academic Achievement Key:</b>	
4 = Exemplary	Work goes beyond grade-level standards.
3 = Accomplished	Work is proficient and meets grade level standards.
2 = Developing	Work is below grade-level standard, but progress is being made.
1 = Beginning	Work is far below grade-level standard.
No Mark	Not assessed this term

Student Progress Reports are standards based and written in learning target language. Students receive progress reports quarterly. La Tierra Community School progress reports monitor students' progress towards proficiency within a given quarter of study and are aligned with pedagogical practices of effective feedback.

Students' grades for a given quarter are assigned based on classroom performance indicators derived from ongoing anecdotal records, recognized habits of works, weekly and daily assignments, long-term and weekly learning target trackers, beginning and end of unit tests and collections of student generated work samples. All students are working towards Accomplished and/or Exemplary levels of learning as they progress through a given school year.

#### Ongoing Assessments for Learning:

All learning experiences have clear learning targets; match assessment methods to targets; and consistently implement quality assessments of learning. Our learning targets are developed as long term learning targets spanning entire units of study, as well as daily and or weekly learning targets for skills and concept mastery. We develop standards-target-assessment planners for student content curriculum, performance assessment plans and project based rubrics for quality work.

#### Formal Assessments of Learning:

All La Tierra Community School students participate in benchmark assessments three times a year as both an academic monitor and an instructional design indicator. The benchmark assessment program that La Tierra Community School currently uses is Galileo. Our assessments are aligned with the Arizona Common Core State Standards. Data from these tests is used to inform instruction, determine risk and achievement levels of students, develop intervention groups, determine grade level and school wide trends, identify learning gaps through disaggregated data and can further be used as a system of instruction through developing assignments based on standards mastery. La Tierra uses Galileo assessment data to fashion SMART goals and to project how our student body will fare on the AIMS assessments. All students are benchmark assessed in reading, language arts, writing and mathematics. Currently, grades 3-8 also are assessed in science and we will continue to assess all areas through grades seven and eight.

La Tierra also implements an oral reading fluency and reading comprehension benchmark assessment three times a year through the Dibels Next Program.

#### Portfolios:

Throughout the year, teachers archive student work samples that correlate to Accomplished learning targets. All of work samples are accumulated in student individual portfolios and are organized according to English Language Arts, Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Spanish and Dramatic Arts. Portfolio Presentations happen during the last three weeks of the school year and demonstrate a years worth of learning accomplishments. The students must invite a panel of three individuals (one person must not be related to the student) to their Portfolio Presentation. The teacher attends all student Portfolio Presentations and the panel and teacher complete a Portfolio Presentation rubric while the students present their work. Portfolio Presentations are a formal process and are presented as part of students' criteria for passage to the next grade level.

#### Strategic Planning Process:

Please see the Strategic Action Plan at [www.latierracommunityschool.org](http://www.latierracommunityschool.org) that is reviewed and revised quarterly by the Strategic Planning Committee. Throughout the Strategic Planning process the committee, comprised of community members, parents, faculty and board members, reviews demographic data to assess our populations of students and how we are best reaching them socially emotionally and academically. We take time to consider feedback from parents and community members to encourage consensus-based growth. Through sub-committees we scrutinize data in order to encourage healthy student attendance rates, positive character education models, curriculum enhancement, etc. It is an endeavor that all members approach with integrity.

The process of auditing our needs (Comprehensive Needs Assessment) informs our capacity to implement SMART Goals and meaningful interventions and differentiation.

#### SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely):

As a team, our faculty uses data to inform instruction and develop consistent differentiated learning opportunities for our students. We consistently review our benchmark assessment data and collaborate to determine strengths and challenges in our learning environment. Through data interpretation we work together to develop SMART goals. Our SMART goals are developed and implemented both school wide and at specific grade levels. We review our SMART goals quarterly to determine our progress towards accomplishing these goals. The goals guide our interventions and differentiation.

### Interventions & Differentiation:

The pedagogy of Expeditionary Learning that we implement is consistently differentiated to meet the variety of levels of learners in our classrooms. Students who do not demonstrate content mastery through evidence displayed within classroom performance, ongoing assessments for and of learning, as well as formal assessments including Galileo Benchmarks, Dibels Benchmarks, and AIMS, will be identified and integrated into intensive intervention groups for differentiated instruction focusing on skill and concept acquisition pertaining to their grade level standards and individual needs. La Tierra facilitates the same process for students excelling beyond grade level in order to expand their learning opportunities to become deeper and richer so they can continue to grow above and beyond Exemplary. Some students falling far below grade level, who continue not to demonstrate evidence of growth beyond a Beginning level, will follow the course of intense remediation plans and will be required to attend after school tutoring, recommended to private tutors and/or recommended to attend a summer session. Students who meet specific criteria falling far below grade level may be considered for retention.

All of La Tierra Community School's practices for keeping students on track towards adequate progress towards proficient are relative to goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound, and aligned with AZ LEARNs requirements.

Based on La Tierra Community School's comprehensive needs assessment, we have a few shifts happening this year at LTCS.

- Hired a math/science specialist in grades 5-8.
- Revised and re-wrote the curriculum to increase comprehension strategies and to embed an intentional culture of critical thinking, increased applied learning practices, and fostering a culture of compare and contrast.
- Integrated science across the curriculum.
- Added a music program.
- Developed specific regular pull out intervention groups for struggling writers, readers, and mathematicians falling in the bottom 25%.
- Regular progress monitoring for students falling in the bottom 25%.
- Integrating a specific early intervention program in grades K-2 for reading and math.
- Developed a new school-wide behavior management system.
- Developed a Habits of Work accountability and tracking system.

If you have any further concerns or questions about academic accountability at La Tierra, please see Mrs. Roderick.