

CHAPTER 2

STUDENT COMMUNITY PROFILE –

OVERALL SUMMARY FROM ANALYSIS OF PROFILE DATA

Analysis of the data included in Chapter 1 and our discussions about it led to the following observations that have implications for student performance.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

ENROLLMENT & DIVERSITY

Gunn's population has grown by approximately 200 students over the course of our existing WASC Plan (2003-2009). District demographic projections indicate that we can expect growth to continue. The High School Task Force recommended in December 2007 that a projected increase of 400 to 500 students be accommodated on the Gunn campus to reach a maximum capacity of 2300 in four to five years.

We also noted that Gunn is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically, linguistically and culturally. About 8% of our students are English Language Learners and a further 27% are RFEP students who are mainstreamed but still acquiring academic language. About one third of all Gunn families speak a language other than English at home and well over 30 languages are represented on our campus.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to expand facilities to accommodate a larger student population if we are to maintain current class size averages and a student to teacher ratio that promotes student success. This includes expansion of specialist classrooms such as music as well as regular classroom, restroom, food service and other capacity.
- We need to explore additional course offerings to meet the needs of a larger and more diverse student body. These course offerings should reflect the global background and interests of our community.
- Since our students must compete in a rapidly changing global economy, existing courses and new course offerings need to stress the importance of helping students become critical and creative thinkers who have the ability to adjust and adapt to changing conditions.
- Since campus capacity may not keep pace with growth in student numbers, we many need to explore others ways to structure our school day (early or late classes for example) to accommodate student needs.
- We need to ensure that all Gunn teachers have the opportunity to participate in ongoing professional development that equips them to work successfully with English Language Learners and an increasingly diverse student body.

SPECIAL EDUCATION, SPECIAL PROGRAMS & STUDENT SUPPORT

We noted that although the percentage of all students enrolled in Special Education has remained constant, there is a disproportionate number of Latino and African American students enrolled in Special Education programs. This is the case across the District. The District recognizes that there is an achievement gap resulting in a disproportionate number of referrals of under-represented minority students to Special Education and is taking steps to address it under its Strategic Plan.

Special programs and services at Gunn offer support to students who have not flourished and may not flourish without additional support or who may need a different setting in which to achieve their goals. AVID/Focus on Success offers a safety net for well over 100 students annually. Evaluations from students and parents attest to its efficacy. Other alternative and support programs serve fewer students but we must continue to monitor their effectiveness in serving our students.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to continue to evaluate the success of support and alternative programs that support and enhance student performance.
- We will continue to monitor student use of the Academic Center and tutorial time to ensure that we are making the best use of resources in meeting student needs.
- We need to insure that all teachers have the tools to work with the entire student population. We need to provide professional development focused on instructional strategies, content delivery and performance assessment that provide the scaffolding for all students (including Special Education, under-represented minority, and ELL students) to access the curriculum and be successful.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Gunn students have multiple opportunities to become involved and participate in student activities and our students meet with great success in many of their athletic and extra-curricular endeavors. The more students are involved in school life, the greater the likelihood that their achievement levels will increase. As numbers grow, however, a smaller percentage of students can hold leadership positions, play on selective teams, etc. In addition, the bigger the student population, the harder it is to maintain effective communication with each person.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to explore ways to provide opportunities for a greater total number of students to be involved in campus life. The student body will need to think creatively about how to extend student involvement opportunities.
- We need to continue efforts to improve communication with our students so that they are informed about all aspects of school life, about how to prepare for and apply to college, apply for financial aid, seek jobs, seek help, etc.

PARENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & SUPPORT

Parent involvement is vital to student success. Parents want and need to be informed regularly about their students' progress and levels of performance. The District and Gunn have systems in place but not all teachers participate in or use them. Regular communication with parents is essential especially when students may be struggling to meet standards. When home and school work together, students are more likely to succeed.

Gunn receives a great deal of support from parents and the community, financially and in volunteer time devoted to Gunn and its programs. We depend on it to fund some classified and certificated positions, to provide funding for specific programs and to help run the school at its present levels of service.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to continue our efforts to improve communication between home and school and to involve parents in the life of the Gunn community.
- We should continue our efforts to connect with special interest parent groups such as the Parent Network for Students of Color, the College Pathways Parents, and the Parent Advisory Committee for ELL students. This will help our work on closing the achievement gap.

SCHOOL SAFETY & SECURITY

Technology has created some new ways for us to improve campus security and safety. We have installed surveillance cameras at the bike cages for example. But technology has also created some new ways for students to create and encounter difficulties. Harassment has extended to include cyberbullying. The number of cases is very small but we feel the need to be proactive in preventing it. Discipline issues are small in

number and offenses usually minor at Gunn. Truancy is not a big problem for the school but it is a problem for some students because it adversely impacts their academic performance.

Implications for student performance:

- We must continue to monitor attendance and tardiness carefully and hold students accountable.
- The importance of their role and responsibility in helping to create a welcoming environment needs to be communicated to students. We must continue to educate students about the need to build and maintain a school climate that is free of harassment. Work on identity safety needs to continue so that all students feel valued and comfortable at school. The absence of identity safety has been shown to depress performance.

STAFF DATA

Gunn has a highly qualified staff, many of whom are new or relatively new to the school. Student achievement is very strongly linked to the relationships teachers have with their students as well as their subject competence. Gunn has actively worked to increase the numbers of staff from minority backgrounds so that there are strong role models and support for our under-represented minority students. It is important that teachers are supported in developing the skills and expertise they need to help students achieve academically and to challenge students to raise their performance levels. 21% of Gunn staff do not yet have CLAD certification or its equivalent but, with the support and encouragement that is being provided by the District, all Gunn teachers will have this certification within two years.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to continue to hire the best and to provide ongoing professional development for our teachers so that they have the opportunity to develop the expertise needed to work with a highly talented and highly motivated student population. This, more than any other single factor, will improve student performance.
- About one third of Gunn students are still acquiring academic English language so we will continue to support their development.

B. STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA

Gunn students score well on the State Standards tests. Participation rates have improved significantly over the past 3 years and our API has shown continuous improvement. Gunn meets all AYP and NCLB accountability measures. The percentage of students scoring at proficient and advanced levels in almost every subject area continues to show improvement. However, disaggregated performance data indicate that the levels of performance for Latino and African American students do not match those of White and Asian students. A high percentage of both groups is enrolled in support programs such as Special Education or ELL.

Gunn students perform well on the CAHSEE overall but again, disaggregated data show that under-represented minority students have more difficulty passing the test than either White or Asian students.

A high percentage of Gunn students complete the a-g requirements for admission to the UC/CSU systems. However, PAUSD graduation requirements are lower than are needed to qualify for the public universities. A high percentage of Gunn students take college admissions tests, SAT and ACT, and do well on them.

Gunn offers a wide range of challenging, advanced-level courses. Students who enroll in them do well but a lower percentage of African American and Latino students are enrolled in them than of White and Asian students.

Implications for student performance:

- We need to continue to work on raising the achievement levels of under-represented minority students with respect to STAR tests and CAHSEE.
- We need to examine graduation requirements as they relate to college readiness. The District's Strategic Plan adopted in May 2008 will require us to do this.
- We need to encourage African American and Latino students to take more challenging courses and support them while they are enrolled in them.
- We need to provide support and encouragement to under-represented minority students to prepare for and take college admissions tests in order to increase college readiness and the college-going rate for this group and help close the achievement gap.

C. PERCEPTION DATA

Perception data was collected from surveys conducted of 1209 students, 120 teachers and 237 parents in the spring of 2008. Students were surveyed at school, teachers completed the survey during a Staff Development Day and parents were invited, via email, to take the survey online.

Copies of the surveys are contained in the Appendix and a list of questions asked, together with a summary of responses, is included in Chapter 1 of this report.

These surveys were conducted prior to a donation being received that allowed work to proceed on installing an artificial turf surface on the football field and before a bond to refurbish and modernize the schools was passed in Palo Alto in June 2008. Thus some of the responses from all parties regarding facilities, especially athletics facilities, are probably less positive than they might be if the survey were given today.

The surveys indicate that students, teachers and parents are happy with the school and believe that students are receiving a high quality education in an environment that is safe and orderly and that has high expectations for student achievement. Parents choose to live in this community because of the quality of the schools. Students feel welcome and connected to the school and they, together with teachers, feel that the school climate is supportive and conducive to learning. Students are positive about their role in helping to plan activities and generally satisfied with the quality of school activities. There is agreement among all parties that students have access to the resources and technology they need to promote learning. Teachers are perceived as providing help and support for students outside class time. Some teachers and parents feel more could be done to reach out to students.

There is also similarity between the three groups regarding areas of concern. Teachers and parents agree that Gunn could do a better job in career/technical education and we will increase the range of course options open to students. The professionally developed surveys provided to us through WASC included mention of health education and this was an area where both teachers and parents rated Gunn lower than other departments. Because Gunn does not have a Health Education department per se, it is not clear what improvements people had in mind and we will follow up to ascertain where improvements should or could be made.

Teachers, students and parents agree that the school could do a better job of recognizing students for all kinds of achievements and accomplishments, that there are questions about the appropriateness of the amount of homework assigned and that students have difficulty relating what they are learning to their lives and futures. Parents and students agree that there is a need to improve communication about the school, how it functions and where to get help or information.

Although the school is perceived as providing a safe environment, all three groups expressed concern about substance abuse by students and about bullying. All groups believe that cheating is strongly discouraged at Gunn.

Implications for student performance:

- Gunn needs to find ways to make learning more relevant to students, to help them relate what they are learning to their futures, and to see the connections between the things they are learning.
- We should examine ways to improve the variety and quality of courses in career/technical education and to explore ways to deliver health education more effectively.
- We should explore ways to recognize students for all kinds of achievements and accomplishments.
- We will maintain our commitment to help students make good choices in all aspects of their lives. We will continue to educate students about the dangers of substance abuse and sustain our efforts to eradicate bullying of any kind. Substance abuse, bullying and poor choices negatively impact student performance.
- There is a need to explore ways to provide students with information about all aspects of school life including their selection of courses and guidance in planning their futures. Parents would also like to see communication improve.
- Conversations about the place and volume of student homework should continue.
- We need to continue those activities and efforts that have created a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning.
- We need to continue to work in helping students transition from middle to high school. Articulation with middle schools is very important in this respect.
- We need to continue our work to promote academic integrity and discourage cheating.
- *We need to explore ways to increase opportunities for collaboration between teachers within and between departments to develop instructional activities that are interdisciplinary in nature.*

AREAS OF CRITICAL ACADEMIC NEED BASED ON THE DATA & THEIR CORRELATION WITH THE ESLRS

Our analysis of and discussion about our community's demographic, student performance and perception data led us to conclude that the most important academic needs at Gunn are:

- Meeting the needs of an expanding and increasingly diverse population and working to ensure that they are college-ready or work-ready upon graduation.
- Continuing our work on closing the achievement gap for African American and Latino students.
- Building students' capacity to communicate effectively and communicating effectively to students and parents. Maintaining strong communication channels at all levels but especially about school and between home and school are vital.

We also felt that ensuring that we continue to hire a highly qualified teaching staff and provide professional support and development for them is vital since teachers are the key to student performance.

Identifying these critical academic needs led us to focus on four rather than three ESLRs for our self study because there are four that correlate very closely with them.

ESLR number one is:

Demonstrate knowledge of key concepts, principles, processes, facts and skills in the disciplines of language arts, history-social science, mathematics, science, physical education, visual and performing arts, foreign language, career vocational education, and health/practical living skills.

We refer to this one as “content.” We have to develop courses to meet the needs of a growing and changing student community. As we do this we need to provide access to a curriculum that capitalizes on our diversity and that stresses social responsibility and ethical behavior.

Acquiring and being able to demonstrate mastery of course content is the key to college admission and to being work ready. It is the key to closing the performance achievement gap.

ESLR number two is:

Effective communication through listening, speaking and writing.

We need to educate students who are to become effective communicators if they are to be successful and we also need to be effective communicators ourselves to assist them and their parents throughout the educational process. They must also be tech savvy to be effective communicators in the 21st century.

ESLR number three is:

Ability to integrate knowledge among disciplines.

We refer to this as “connections.” The world our students will enter as adults is one that is increasingly connected. It will require flexibility and an ability to accept and adapt to rapid change. Most of them will change occupations several times during their working lives and be required to develop new skills. They must have the ability to connect existing knowledge to new knowledge quickly if they are to remain competitive.

ESLR number four is:

Critical and creative thinking to solve problems.

Referring to them as “the C’s” helps us remember them and keep them at the forefront of our thinking.

***QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE,
DEMOGRAPHIC & PERCEPTION DATA***

- What kinds of courses and programs should be developed in order to meet student and parent needs and interests. What should be the time frame for development? In which departments is there potential for growth and expansion?
- How can we best maintain and foster a feeling of belonging to a community as the school grows?
- How can we make sure Gunn is an identity safe place for students, teachers and parents?
- Are we meeting the needs of ELL/RFEP students and parents?
- Will facilities development keep pace with the growth in student numbers? If not what adjustments and adaptations will be possible/necessary to accommodate students?
- How can we create more opportunities for student involvement in a larger school? How should we go about recognizing students for all kinds of accomplishments?
- Can we make more and better use of the data available to us through Cruncher and the District in order to improve instruction?
- What additional support can we provide to students struggling to pass CAHSEE?
- How can we work more effectively on closing the achievement gap?
- What impact will making the UC a-g requirements the requirements for graduation from PAUSD as the District has suggested in the Strategic Plan have on students? On graduation rates?

- How can we increase the participation of under-represented minority students in advanced courses?
- What avenues do we have or can we create to improve communication between home and school?
Between teachers about students? Between students and counselors? On campus generally?
- What kinds professional development and support best help teachers as they work to meet student needs?
How can we ensure that best practices are shared?
- What changes or improvements can we make in career/technical education and in health education to better meet student needs?
- What can be done to help students make connections between different fields of learning and between what they are learning and their own lives and futures?
- What can we do to improve communication with our students? Survey results show that Gunn students do not always feel they know where to get or find essential information.
 - 45% indicated that they do not know how to access personal support services
 - 38% do not know where to get information about student life and extra-curricular activities
 - 27% do not feel they have adequate information about course choices and college admissions
 - 33% do not know where to get information about college applications and scholarships
 - 22% do not know where to get information about sports or athletics.
- 78% of students indicated they would welcome or be OK with an advisory period that might offer ways to improve communication. This is an avenue that should be explored so how should we best go about this?
- What are the most effective ways to deal with substance abuse issues and bullying?
- How do we find or create time for staff collaboration on curriculum and for articulation with middle schools?
- How can we best continue our work on promoting academic integrity and maintaining a positive school climate?
- We need to continue discussion on the role of homework. What is an appropriate amount of homework at different levels of student development and in different classes?