

Midterm Review Visiting Committee Report

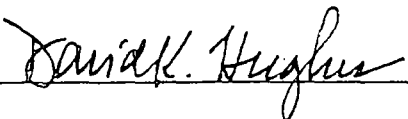
For

Crenshaw High School

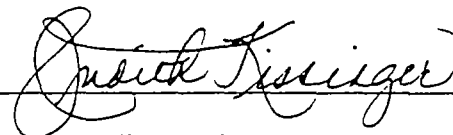
April 24, 2000

David K. Hughes
Superintendent
Escondido Union High School District
302 N. Midway Drive
Escondido, CA 92027

Judith Kissinger
Director, Secondary Education
San Bernardino City Unified
777 North F Street
San Bernardino, CA 92410



David K. Hughes
Committee Chair



Judith Kissinger
Committee Member

I. Introduction

- A. Crenshaw High School first opened its doors in January 1968 to relieve over-crowding at other nearby high school campuses. They are one of forty-nine public comprehensive high schools serving grades 9-12 in the Los Angeles Unified School District. They are home to two Magnet programs: The Gifted/High Ability Magnet and the first high school Teacher Training Magnet in California. They also share their campus with the Crenshaw Adult School and Whitney Young Continuation School. Crenshaw was one of the first four high schools in their district to become a LEARN (Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now) school. They made that decision based on their desire to remedy some problems that have plagued their school community for several years: student attrition, low test scores, high absenteeism, and school/community safety.

In 1997, they became a Charter School. Crenshaw along with seventeen other schools in the Crenshaw/Dorsey Cluster, make up the only Charter Cluster in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Further, most recently, they became a Digital High School and are in the process of opening their state-of-the-art New Media Academy. Therefore, a good descriptive title for their school would be Crenshaw LEARN Charter Digital High School augmented by two Magnets and a Media Academy.

Crenshaw High School is home to approximately 2,700 students with the following ethnic distributions: 78% African American; 21% Latin American up from 17.78% in 1996-97; 1% other (this includes Native Americans, Filipino and Anglo Americans). These students are distributed between the comprehensive high school and magnet programs as follows: The comprehensive high school has 2274 students which includes 382 Special Education students, 250 GATE students and 224 English Learners (EL) students whose home languages are Spanish, French, and Creole. The enrollment in the two Magnet Schools is as follows: 198 students are in the Gifted/High Ability Magnet and 314 students in the Teacher Training Magnet.

Their school is impacted by the same factors that affect other inner-city schools. These include high transiency and drop out rates, poor attendance, low student motivation, underachievement, and limited parental involvement. In addition, more than forty percent of their students are from families who are eligible to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and sixty-nine percent participate in the Federal Meal program.

- B. One of the most significant changes in the school since the last visit has been the change in leadership. The principal in place during the previous

visit left the school at the end of that year. She was replaced by one of the assistant principals who remained for one year only. At that time, the current principal was brought in. He had served at the school previously as an assistant principal but was not involved in the WASC Focus on Learning process.

A second change made since the last visit has been a change in the bell schedule. The school moved from the block schedule to a traditional schedule. The general feeling is that the traditional schedule has helped with classroom management and tardiness. While the block schedule served some departments and students well, it was felt that the staff was not sufficiently trained in how to use it to be of benefit to most students.

A third change has been that Crenshaw High School became a Charter school in 1997 along with the other schools in the cluster. The hope was that a Charter cluster would bring a K-12 perspective to the curriculum as well as encourage communication and articulation among the schools. The impact of becoming a Charter has been limited.

Fourth, the staff has turned over significantly since the initial visit. Many of the new teachers are new to the profession and not fully credentialed.

Finally, the school has received a Digital High School grant. There is evidence that technology has been purchased, but it was not observed in use outside of specific computer applications classes.

- C. This year, the faculty was divided into groups according to the six Schoolwide Critical Areas for Follow-up. Where possible, members of the five original focus groups stayed with the follow-up group most closely related to their original focus group. Each group was charged with finding data that responded to the concerns raised by the original visiting team. Using that data, each group wrote a draft response for the mid-term report. The drafts were compiled into a final draft by an administrator, reviewed by the staff, and distributed to the entire faculty.

The follow-up activities in the first two years following the initial visit were far less focused. It was stated that the Instructional Leadership Team kept the follow-up areas in mind when making plans. There was no evidence, however, that the school addressed the critical areas for follow-up in any systematic, pro-active way until this year. The activities this year appear to have been driven by the need to complete the mid-term report. That is, the process was characterized by identifying things that has happened in the normal course of events that could fit as a response to the concerns of the original visiting team.

II. Follow-Up Process (Accomplishments of each schoolwide action plan section)

Many of the changes that have taken place since the original visit, especially those related to changes in leadership and key staff, have been considered as "destabilizing factors" that "necessitated adjustments and a deceleration in the pace of improvement process." It is not possible for the visiting team to assess to what degree this is true. It appeared however, that the improvement plans that came from the WASC process were not used to their best advantage to provide the direction that was intended.

The mid-term report reflects an emphasis on activity as opposed to results. Student achievement has remained unchanged. Some students do well and leave the school equipped to compete; many do not. The staff often points to individual success stories and other anecdotal data to show the success of the school. They also point to the many barriers to learning that are in the environment. While both are true, the inability or unwillingness to fully address the data on student achievement has hindered the progress of the school.

The staff was, and continues to be, split between those who are skilled and committed to student achievement and those who are unwilling or unable to provide engaging and challenging instruction. Those in the former group point to the successes that come from their individual effort with appropriate and well-deserved pride. However, there remains a tremendous need to address the school

as an entire organization. The environment and culture for schoolwide change and improvement, which appeared to be developing at the time of the original visit, has not matured.

With these comments as context, the progress on individual goals has been as follows:

A. Assessment plan to measure the success of all students meeting Crenshaw expectations (ESLRs).

A rubric has been designed to indicate progress toward meeting expectations. Plans have not yet been developed to design activities intended to help students achieve these goals. Students will be periodically instructed on how to collect evidence that they are making progress towards achieving the ESLRs. This evidence will be kept in the students' Graduation Portfolio.

The on-site review team believes that activities alone will not produce expected student (schoolwide) learning results. Learning results must be tied to achievement of standards, district, state and schoolwide assessments and benchmarks. Expected student learning results must communicate the culture and care of the school and the community. The school and community must hold the same expectations for all students and agree on systemic, well-communicated ways to prove all students are

making sufficient progress toward meeting those expectations. This is neither evident nor clear at this time.

B. A systemic assessment plan to measure the improvement levels of student achievement in all programs at Crenshaw High.

The focus group identified the following criteria for assessment of schoolwide student progress:

- Student performance in academic subjects
- Stanford 9 scores
- Graduation rate
- Commitment to post-secondary education/career choice

Data collected for the mid-term review indicated approximately 80% of the 220 GATE students and 36% of the 342 Teacher Training students earned grades of A or B in English. GATE students scored an average 59% in reading on the SAT-9 and Teacher Training students scored an average of 22%. There was no indication in the report about the other 2,000 plus students, total school average, or information broken down by grade level. The on-site team believes there is much work to be done to accurately disaggregate and analyze the data, and to activate specific and

aggressive plans to develop classroom curriculum and instructional strategies sufficient to increase student achievement.

- C. **To increase the number of students successfully completing a four-year course of study by addressing those factors within the school's control that contribute to student success.**

Nine basic factors were identified as barriers to student graduation rates. Twenty-five school programs and activities that promote student success were identified, and a student survey was administered. There was no action plan developed as a result of the information. This goal has not been sufficiently explored or addressed.

- D. **To increase student motivation and eventual achievement by a comprehensive staff development plan linked to the ESLRs.**

A rubric was developed to evaluate the staff development activities that took place between May 1997 and spring 2000. Based on the results, a guide was developed for planning future staff development including:

- eliminating lecture-only presentations using more visuals
- presenting staff developments that reach all classrooms and motivate students
- use of technology

- provide professionals as presenters

The goals focus on adult activity and overlook student needs, standards, instructional expectations and accountability.

The on-site review team believes the staff development follow-up falls short of a systematic plan to increase instructional expectations and strategies as a means to improve student achievement.

- E. **To raise the expectation levels and strengthen instructional practices geared to all English Learners.**

A report by the follow-up committee described instruction, staffing practices, the monitoring system, and special programs for English Learners. However, the report failed to address the fact that some Crenshaw staff expressed to the 1997 WASC visiting committee in that English Learners are less apt to achieve than other students, or that instructional practices might increase student achievement.

The on-site review team agrees with the need to increase the redesignation rates and applauds efforts to do so. The English Learners staff appears to be hard working and nurturing. Still, there must be efforts planned to

assure the academic and social success of these students as they transition beyond the Program.

F. Develop successful instructional strategies that engage all students as active learners.

A rubric was developed for classroom observations, lesson plans were collected and surveys were conducted. The results rated classroom instructional strategies as a "4" with need for more innovative methods. There was no plan to help teachers develop improved, engaging instructional strategies.

The on-site review team agrees there must be increased expectations for effective instructional practices linked to student results that develop 1) deep content understanding, 2) opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, and 3) critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Their academic classes prepare Crenshaw High School students for college and/or the workplace. Programs range from Advanced Placement classes and honors classes to vocational classes in graphic arts, culinary arts, fashion design, office technology and computer repair. Student leadership development is encouraged through participation in student government.

The percentage of their graduating students enrolling in four-year and two-year colleges has increased. In spring 1999, approximately 43% of their students completed 4 or more A-F classes with a mark of A, B, or C. However, this percentage reflects the fact that 57% of their students are barely passing or failing A-F classes. As mentioned, the percentage of students enrolled in AP classes increased, as has the number of AP courses offered although the number of students passing the AP test is low.

It should be noted however that, 353 out of 500 eleventh grade students have at least a 2.0 GPA and are passing all of their classes and 403 seniors are passing their classes. However, their Stanford 9 test scores revealed an alarming picture: At least 50% of their student population scored poorly and need assistance in the following areas: using information, study skills, reading comprehension, writing, mathematics and critical thinking (staff members feel students are lacking in critical thinking skills). Also, evidence from twenty-week report cards as of June 1999 showed that a significant number of Crenshaw High School students were failing two or more classes. Some of the fails were due to poor attendance, but the majority were due in part to lack of achievement.

III. Recommendations where additional attention is needed in the action plan:

The primary recommendation for additional attention is for the staff to recognize the potential the WASC process has as a viable vehicle for change and improvement. Currently programs and activities are designed, and implemented, and then cited as examples of progress toward the WASC goals. Instead, the goals need to be used to guide the design of the programs that are developed. The individual programs that have been put into place have merit. For example, the school's efforts at reducing student and staff tardiness clearly address Critical Area #3. However, this effort was not seen as directly related to the WASC recommendation and was not included in the mid-term report.

The staff also needs to recognize that the intention of the WASC recommendations is to improve student achievement. What do students know? How do you know that they know it? How can teachers learn how and be motivated to provide a variety of engaging instructional strategies? These questions are at the heart of the recommendations and need to be addressed.