

TAF ACADEMY NETWORK: YEAR END REPORT

JULY 2009
(INAUGURAL EDITION)



PREPARED BY
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TECHNOLOGY



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F O U N D A T I O N

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TAF Academy Major Funders (100K+)

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Paul Allen Foundation

Funders and Support

Microsoft
Individual Donors
Foundation Grant makers

TAF Academy Management Team

Trish Millines Dziko	Executive Director (TAF)
Tom Murphy	Superintendent (FWPS)
Sally McLean	Chief Financial Officer (FWPS)
Zithri Saleem	Director of Education (TAF)
Chuck Christensen	Human Resources Director (FWPS)

TAF Education Team

Robyn Viloría	Student Achievement Manager
Troy Hilton	Education Technology Manager
Daniese Allen	Program Coordinator
Jennifer Youngblood	Support Coordinator
Miles Kubota	Intern
Eileen Diviringi	Intern

TAF Academy @ Federal Way Public Schools Faculty

Laura Davis-Brown	Principal
Nicole Russell	Academic Coach
Denise Mosley	Front Office Manager
Nancy Schroeder	Front Office Administration
Damaris Pearson	Career & College Counselor

TAF Academy @ FWPS Teachers

Dave Neese	Middle School Humanities
Deborah North	Middle School Math and Science
Judy Cowling	High School Math and Science
Andrew Miller	High School Humanities
Charity Allen	French Teacher
Tabi Eberhardt	Art Teacher

TAF Academy Strategic Partners

Federal Way Public Schools (FWPS)	Federal Way, WA
Digital Learning Commons	Seattle, WA
Buck Institute for Education	Novato, CA
Small Schools Project	Seattle, WA

Additional Thanks To:

TAF Staff, FWPS School Board, FWPS Central Administration, TAF Academy Student Body, TAF Academy PTSA, Federal Way Chamber of Commerce, Kent City Council, University of Washington, Seattle University, TAF Academy Network Oversight Committee and numerous supporters who made this effort possible.



June 30, 2009

Dear TAF Academy Stakeholder,

On September 8th, 2008, one hundred thirty-two students anxiously gathered at a small campus in the shadows of the Pacific Northwest Cascades to embark on a historic educational journey. It had been over three years in the making, but the first day of the very first TAF Academy in Federal Way Public Schools (www.fwps.org/taf) had come, bringing with it a new promise of opportunity and high academic achievement for each of the inaugural enrollees.

The primary objective for Year One was simple: create a “culture of high expectations” for both students and adults that will lay the groundwork for success. This meant artfully carving out sacred time and meeting spaces for ten new teachers, one hundred and thirty students, three new administrators, public school district officials and a private foundation to all get on the same page to answer the essential question, “What does success look and sound like at TAF Academy?”

The formative groundwork covered all aspects of small school management (i.e., structure, culture, leadership) and was deliberate in the creation of norms, processes, and protocols that would set the stage for rapid, continuous improvement over the next three to five years. Whether whole group, small group or one-on-one, all stakeholders worked together to meet challenges and resolve conflicts in the best interest for each TAF Academy student. As we persevered through the challenges of starting a new school, however, three “must win” battles emerged:

- Establish a learning community that exhibits behaviors consistent with the belief that **every** student at TAF Academy would achieve academically
- Deliver programs that address the collective and individual needs of the TAF Academy community, including support and accountability for students, teachers and parents to maintain and reach high expectations
- Increase TAF’s organizational capacity to manage high academic achievement across a network of small schools in Washington State—starting with school #1

As the year took shape, acculturation by students and teachers became increasingly evident allowing TAF to shift our emphasis from a mere “culture of high expectations” to a more substantial “culture of high student achievement.”

I faithfully acknowledge our staff whose tireless work and dedication resulted in a momentous inaugural year. I am humbled by the experience of opening a school and the effort it takes to move students toward high achievement. Our team learned a lot and we are excited about the structures and strategies we put in place for year two.

We are confident that moving into the next year we can realistically expect all of our students to experience significant growth in all subject areas and demonstrate their potential for high academic achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trish Millines Dziko', written in a cursive style.

Trish Millines Dziko
Executive Director, Technology Access Foundation

BUILDING ON 13 YEARS OF AMAZING OUTCOMES

Since 1996, TAF has successfully readied students of color for college and careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) related fields through three after-school programs—TechStart, Technical Teens Internship Program (TTIP), and Higher ED Bound. The programs built on each other by involving students in an age-appropriate, project-based exploration of core math and science concepts and their practical application using technology as a learning tool.

TTIP, the former flagship program at TAF, which combined sophisticated technical training in computer programming, network engineering, web development and database engineering with soft-skills training that allowed our teenagers to parlay their skills into college and career success. As part of the program, TTIP students participated in paid internships at leading companies in the Puget Sound region, including Microsoft, Alaska Airlines, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Safeco Insurance, Avande, K & L Gates, and Miller Hull Architects. The proud legacy of TTIP, which ran from 1996-2007, is the foundation for our vision of TAF Academy.

TAF SUCCESS RECORD

- Over 600 teens have burnished their technical and work skills through summer internships
- 100% of TAF seniors graduated high school on-time
- 100% entered college
- Over 40 TAF alumni have graduated college

Notwithstanding our 10 plus years of success, we were inundated with a growing body of evidence (both empirical and anecdotal) that communities of color and low income families across our state continued to fail. High dropout rates and low test scores were accepted as the norm in underserved communities, and with each passing year, another generation of talented young people fell through the cracks of a broken public education system. The question for TAF and many of our stakeholders quickly became: **How do we scale TAF's outcomes to reach more students in more communities?**

In 2005, with support from the Gates Foundation and the Paul Allen Foundation, TAF developed a sustainable, replicable model for a 6th through 12th grade **public school** called **TAF Academy**. Our vision was to create a network of 5 exemplary schools in Washington State that used research-based educational practices, effective instruction and a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) curriculum to prepare all students, particularly low income students of color, to be ready for college, STEM careers and prosperous life in the 21st century.

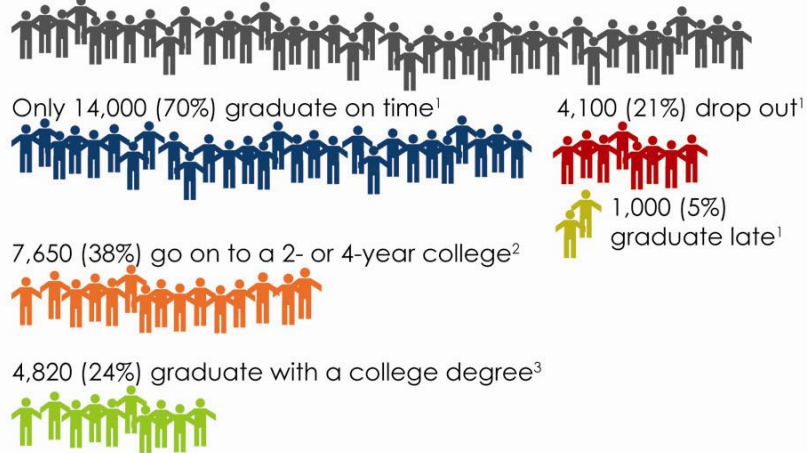
**TAF ACADEMY IS A
HOLISTIC APPROACH TO
STUDENT LEARNING.
OUR PRIMARY FOCUS IS
TO EMPOWER STUDENTS
WITH THE KNOWLEDGE
AND SKILLS THEY NEED
TO BRING ABOUT BETTER
PERSONAL, COMMUNITY
AND GLOBAL CONDITIONS
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY.**

THE TAF ACADEMY DIFFERENCE

TAF Academy is a 6th-12th grade school model with a mission to prepare every student for college and for life through a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focused curriculum. Our goal is to enlist students as active participants in their education and to cultivate a keen awareness of their important role within the world.

What's wrong with this picture? ↑ = 500 students

Today: If we start with 20,000 students in Washington State public schools...



¹ Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Class of 2005-2006

² Washington Board of Education, May 2008 report

³ League of Education Voters, 2007 Citizens Report Card

For low income students and students of color, the picture is even more alarming.

TAF Academy offers a solution with the following goals:

- To **prepare every student for college and life** through a project-based curriculum focused on college readiness, STEM and civic engagement.
- To build a **critical mass of underrepresented minorities** and women to become high-impact leaders in STEM fields and across industries to catalyze positive community and global change.
- To become a **sustainable replicable model** that demonstrates public-private partnerships are an effective tool to support academic achievement of all students.

In the long term, TAF Academy students will surpass current high school and college graduation rates. Our objectives are:

- 100% of TAF Academy students graduate college ready
- 90% of TAF Academy students graduate high school on time
- 90% of TAF Academy students enter college
- 90% of TAF Academy students graduate college within 5 years with a degree in a STEM related field



INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes TAF's major activities during the launch and management of the first TAF Academy. The first portion of this report provides a brief overview of the structures and philosophic background of the TAF Academy model. The second portion focuses on the 2008-09 academic year and gives a narrative account the successes, challenges and evidences of lessons learned by the TAF team as we strived to provide overall programmatic and instructional support to the TAF Academy staff and students. Next, a brief section on "Metrics for Success" presents the results measured during year one. And finally, we conclude with a birds-eye view of the work that lies ahead with recommendations for the foundation and major stakeholders.

Today, TAF Academy @ Federal Way exists as merely a first step in our long-term vision to provide quality education to thousands of students across the full network of five Academies. Establishing the first TAF Academy as an exemplary school fills an immediate need to demonstrate the success of the model. TAF understands with great clarity that the potential to launch additional schools rests largely on the early performance of this first TAF Academy.

TAF's work in Federal Way serves as a conscious guide to the overall growth of the foundation. As outlined in this report, the successes, challenges and lessons learned during this inaugural year pave the way for increased success and scale as we move forward to build the TAF Academy Network.



ABOUT THE TAF ACADEMY MODEL

This section provides a brief overview of the mission, vision and basic philosophies of the TAF Academy model. For more detailed description of the model, consult [The TAF Academy Model](#) documentation or white papers released by TAF which are available on our website: www.techaccess.org.

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE TAF ACADEMY MODEL

Below is a summary of the **Four Core Components** that make TAF Academy a unique academic model in Washington State. Details on each component are on the following pages.

Co-Management Relationship:

Charter schools are not allowed in Washington State. Therefore, private sector contributions to education reform require creative partnerships with public school districts.

Unique Academic Model:

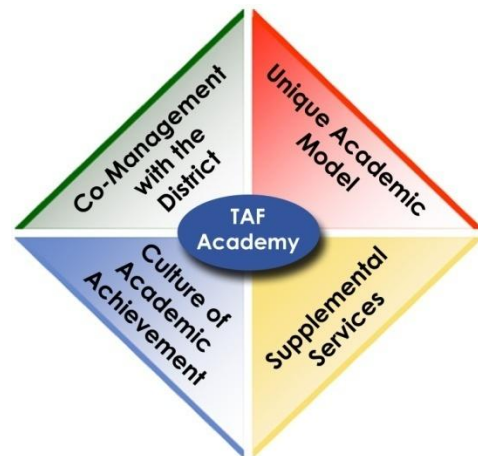
TAF Academy integrates scholarly research and best educational practices with progressive learning structures to ensure that all students maximize their academic achievement. We are moving away from the repetitive application of "traditional" methods that consistently fail to provide widespread achievement.

Culture of Academic Achievement:

Teachers, students, parents and guardians each have an active role in the learning community that supports high academic achievement and holds each other accountable for success.

Supplemental Services:

All students have access to focused academic support as well as academic enrichment programs that keep them engaged and thriving in the learning community.



1. THE CO-MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP

The TAF Academy model affords students exceptional experiences and outcomes through the public school system via a unique public-private partnership. The Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) signed by TAF and FWPS clearly specifies the roles and responsibilities of each partner. It is governed in accordance with federal and state laws and is subject to district policy except where negotiated in the agreement.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

	District	TAF
Principal Selection	The school district and TAF jointly select the Principal	
Teacher Selection	Teachers are selected by the Principal and the TAF Director of Education. Candidates go through district HR process and are part of the Teachers' Union upon employment.	
Student Enrollment	Applies district enrollment criteria	Assists in marketing and recruitment
Academics	Uses per student funding to support academics	Supplements per student costs where state funds are insufficient (see pg 12). In year five, the student body is large enough to fund all core academics.
Facilities	Supplies all facilities, furnishings and classroom supplies	Provides specialized furnishings as needed
Technology	Provides all administrative technology	Provides all technology necessary to support teachers and students in the TAF Academy model
Period 7	Provides transportation	Determines classes, partner organizations, performs evaluations
Professional Development	Provides district standard professional development required by district	Provides professional development specific to TAF Academy instructional models
College Readiness	May provide district-wide opportunities to connect with colleges	Staffs a college counselor and integrates college ready practices into the curriculum

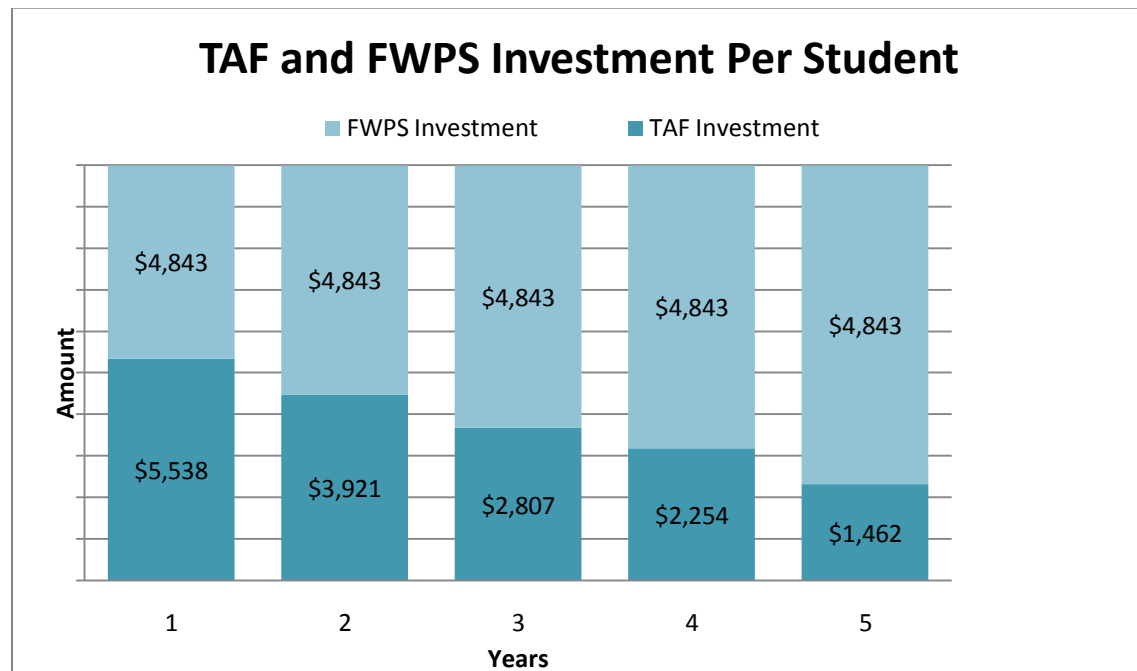
TAF ACADEMY FUNDING: A REAL INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Consistent with nature of the public-private partnership formed between TAF and FWPS, funding for TAF Academy combines public funding from Washington State and private funding from TAF. Private funds are provided to supplement public funds, not supplant them, and are dedicated to five core investment areas that will ensure the fiscal stability of TAF Academy, particularly during its first years of growth.

SUPPLEMENTING STATE FUNDING

In Washington State, funds for education are tied to student enrollment. Facilities and staffing are paid for by funds allocated based on student population. Because TAF Academy opened with only 6th, 7th and 9th grades, not enough students are enrolled to underwrite teacher and administrative staff. TAF is supplementing state funds to ensure those basic staffing needs are met. Over the next four years, as TAF Academy adds additional grade levels, TAF's contribution in this area will phase out. TAF Academy @ FWPS will be fully enrolled in 6th-12th grades by 2012, and state funding will be sufficient to cover all basic facilities and staffing.

The TAF Academy costs are categorized as **direct support** (which goes directly to the school) and **operating support** (which covers TAF's foundation expenses to manage the TAF Academy Network). Direct support per student over five years are as follows:



This chart does not reflect possible increases in state funding. By year 5, TAF's investment, estimated at \$1,462 per student, represents the ongoing support in the **Core Investment Areas** listed below, which remains in effect for the length of the Joint Operating Agreement between TAF and FWPS.

TAF CORE INVESTMENT AREAS

TAF's ongoing investment in TAF Academy supplements the state's per student spending by providing targeted support in areas that are traditionally weak in our public schools. Years of research on the effectiveness of public education has shown that traditional public schools lack innovative academic support practices, effective college-readiness guidelines, effective professional development for teachers, and innovative uses of technology in teaching and learning. Innovative school districts (like Federal Way Public Schools) embrace partnership opportunities to advance their work in education reform.

The following five core investment areas are the hallmark of the TAF Academy framework:

- **Academic support** – Every student struggles academically at some point in their K-12 education. TAF makes academic support in core subjects like math, science, and writing readily available to all who need it. Without easy access to support services, many students do not progress beyond the state requirements and risk chronically falling behind and wasting their potential.
- **College readiness** – Being college-ready not only gets students into college, but it also prepares them for internships and service learning opportunities in industry. TAF ensures all students are aware of the benefits of college, are academically college eligible, and are fully prepared for the rigor of college classes.
- **Teacher professional development** – The key to success in the classroom is to have well-prepared and innovative teachers who have high standards for every child and can manage their own efficacy. TAF ensures that all classroom teachers are continually learning, bringing new best practices to the classroom, and reflecting on their work.
- **Technology** – Using technology as a tool for teaching and learning is an effective way of bringing resources to the classroom that would not otherwise be attainable. TAF Academy uses technology to provide new skills, techniques and information to both teachers and students.
- **Job readiness** – Having practical job experience at an early age adds relevance to what's being taught in the classroom. It also develops leadership skills, self-confidence and a deeper sense of personal responsibility. Starting in their sophomore year, TAF Academy students will participate in an internship training program and will be eligible for paid summer internships in STEM-related fields at local companies. Tentatively called Quasar, the program will be modeled after TAF's legacy program, Technical Teens Internship Program.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, TAF invested in the core areas as follows:

Investment Area	TAF Allocation
Academic Support	\$ 52,986
College Readiness	\$ 57,899
Teacher Professional Development*	\$ 79,870
Technology	\$ 167,816
Job Readiness	\$ -
Teacher Salaries	\$ 305,750
Total Investment 2009-2010	\$ 664,321

*FWPS actuals pending

As defined by the Joint Operating Agreement, TAF assumes responsibility for developing and implementing a rigorous, relevant academic program that meets the requirements of FWPS as well as the goals of TAF's mission. TAF invested an additional \$584,841 in the TAF Education Department in staff and resources for this purpose in 2008-2009.

2. THE UNIQUE ACADEMIC MODEL

At TAF Academy, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) permeate the curriculum across all subject areas, and students and teachers work together to address core content in each subject through a **project-based learning** approach that is aligned to district, state and national standards. With a project-based learning approach in TAF Academy classrooms, students are encouraged to generate new ideas and understandings based on what they have learned in multiple subjects. Authentic, real-world problems allow students to combine work across subject areas and find solutions that are relevant to their lives.

The TAF Academy model is designed to be a **small school model**: classes are capped at 25 students and each grade level has no more than 50 students. Wasley et al. (2000) found that small schools create "intimate learning communities" that allow teachers to provide students more personalized attention, work more collaboratively, and correlate with higher teacher and student satisfaction and better academic outcomes. Beyond mere class size and enrollment however, the TAF Academy model intentionally employs learning structures that augment and extend the benefits of the small school in unique ways.

At the intermediate level, TAF Academy uses **multi-age classrooms** and **looping** to foster deep relationships between students and teachers. For example, 6th graders and 7th graders will share one classroom and keep the same teacher for two years. This helps build a culture of support and achievement. According to Leeds and Marshak (pg 39-41), "when implemented effectively, multi-age classrooms at the intermediate level help reduce learning losses due to student transitions and can build

student confidence as part of an identity they can carry well into high school.

At TAF Academy, the multi-age looping structure is repeated in 8th and 9th grades to create a more natural **high-school transition** that increases **self-directed learning** and emphasizes abstract concepts across all subject areas. Mizelle (2000) found that many high school students felt they would have been better prepared had their middle school teachers “held students more responsible for their learning, taught them more about strategies for learning on their own, and provided them a more challenging curriculum.” For this reason, TAF Academy gradually releases students to monitor and guide their own self-directed learning, beginning with middle school and increasing as they matriculate through the pipeline.

By the 10th grade, each TAF Academy student will have spent four solid years building better self-confidence, a foundation of academic skills, and interpersonal relationships within a rigorous academic environment. Fully acculturated to the TAF Academy model, students will then complete the more **traditional high school core** with many courses tailored to their individual interests. Familiarity with the teacher and peer support systems in TAF Academy allows them to work on more independent projects, or alternatively, to work as part of a collaborative team on larger projects. All TAF Academy core courses are designed to prepare students for non-remedial, college coursework and to ensure everyone attains college eligibility.

In the 12th grade year, students plan and complete their senior project and participate in service-learning opportunities and/or internships with local corporations. Senior coursework is centered around advanced learning opportunities and special projects reflecting individual student and group interests.

3. THE CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

TAF Academy defines “achievement” by the degree to which a student is ready to excel in college. Recent research on **college readiness** shows that it takes more than content knowledge and skills to make students truly “ready” to succeed in college.

At TAF Academy, all components of the school—including, but not limited to, curriculum, school culture, assessment systems, teacher-student relationships, advisement, supplemental support, and parent workshops—will be applied collaboratively to make students truly college-ready in order to earn a TAF Academy diploma. The TAF Academy curriculum addresses each of the core components of college readiness (defined by the formula at the left) as part of an integrated 6th-12th grade school program:

- Habits of mind (learning how to learn)
- Core subject knowledge (key skills and content in each subject area)

The Formula for College Readiness*

College Aware
(contextual skills and awareness)

+ **College Eligible**
(taking necessary courses for college entrance)

+ **College Prepared**
(habits of mind, academic knowledge and skills, academic behavior)

COLLEGE READY

*adapted from Conley, D.

“Toward a More Comprehensive View of College Readiness”

- Attitudes and behaviors (learning to interact with peers and teachers and developing attitudes around learning in the ways they will need to in college)
- Contextual knowledge (learning about college, the admissions process and the culture of colleges)

Because TAF Academy is a small school, staff are able to work one-on-one with students and families through every step of their 6th-12th grade learning experience and through all aspects of the college admissions process, financial aid and scholarship applications. Every day, TAF Academy students “get ready for college” by meeting the challenge of academic projects that foster time management, problem-solving, critical thinking and research and writing skills. The expected outcome for all TAF Academy students is that they possess not only a firm grasp of essential content knowledge in all subjects, but also an understanding of the culture and processes of college.

As part of college preparation, TAF Academy provides each student with an education plan, SAT preparation, parent/student workshops, college visits, and college mentors. Additionally, colleges are invited to give informational presentations to educate TAF Academy students about their college and expose students to their options after high school. Our goal is to graduate every student college ready even if they choose a different path for themselves after graduation. TAF Academy students will graduate ready to shape public life in constructive ways, whether in the neighborhood, city, state, country, or global community.

4. SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES

TAF realizes that some students may arrive at TAF Academy unprepared with the skills, habits and past learning experiences needed for high academic achievement. Therefore, it is essential that we supplement the traditional school day with additional instruction time and specialized services for them. In addition, some students who are thriving during the school day, may be eager to extend their learning into new areas. TAF Academy offers both sets of students opportunities to meet their academic goals.

Period 7 is an after-school academic support and enrichment program that primarily focuses on math and literacy, but also offers enrichment and non-traditional learning opportunities. Period 7 is prescribed for all students in 6th-11th grade who are not performing at standard. At the later grades it offers service learning opportunities and career path courses that involve specialized technology training and an opportunity to compete for paid summer internships.

TAE

Pioneering a New Approach to Public Education



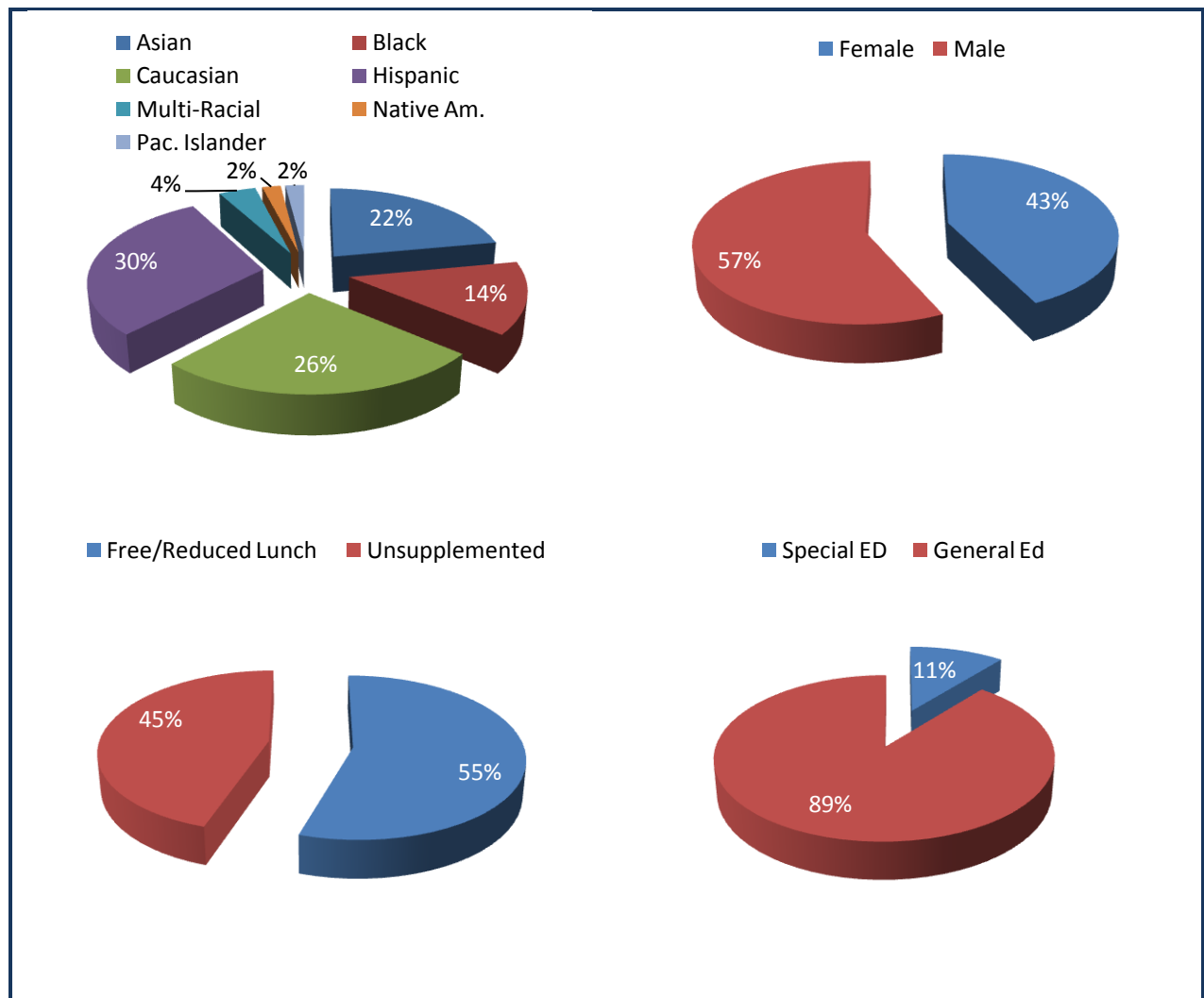
TAF ACADEMY @ FWPS SNAPSHOT

26630 40th Ave. S
 Kent, WA 98032
 (253) 945-5187

SCHOOL INFORMATION

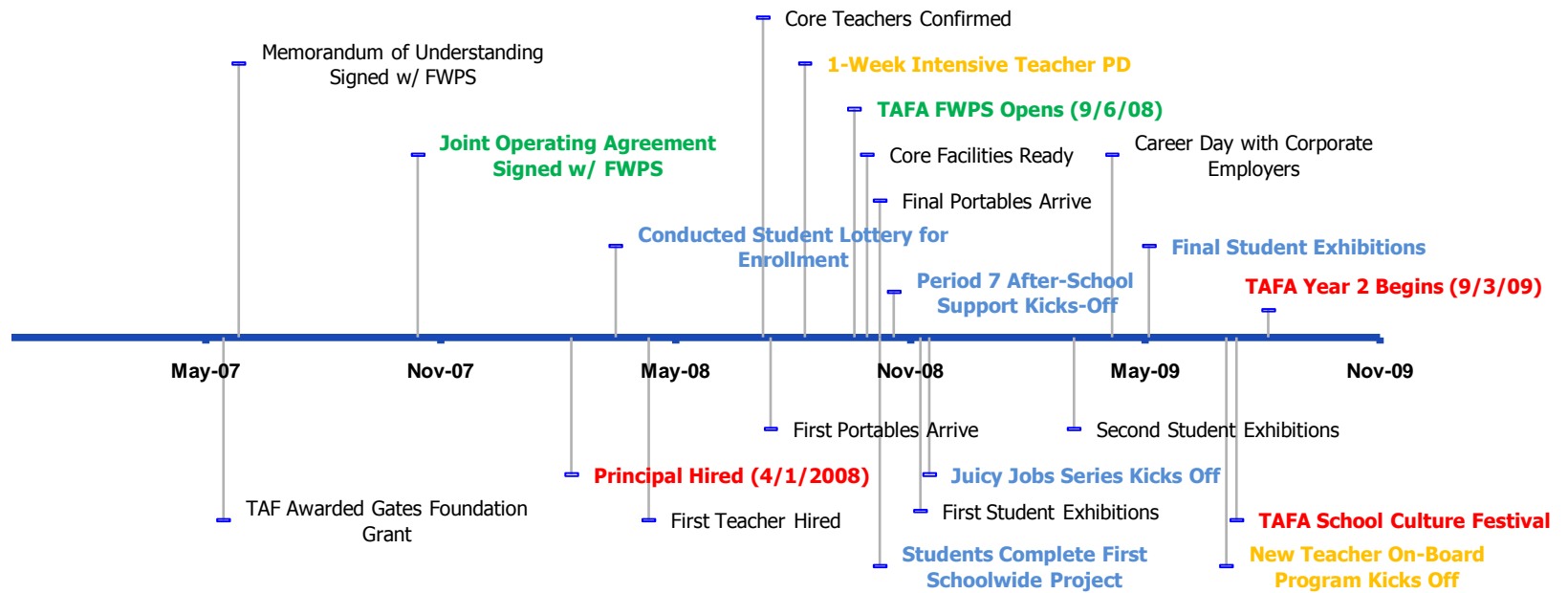
School Leader	Laura Davis-Brown
Year Founded	2008
Grades Served	6 -12 (enrolled grades 6 th , 7 th and 9 th in 2008)
Student Enrollment	127
Number of full time teachers	11

DEMOGRAPHICS



2008-2009 YEAR AT A GLANCE

The first year of TAF Academy was a major success for TAF and all the people who rallied to make TAF Academy possible. From the moment we were notified of the grant award from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to the day our students presented their final projects to authentic audiences of peers, adults and teachers, this effort has been an active, collaborative endeavor to win a critical battle for equity and innovation in public education for Washington State. The path laid out in the timeline below wasn't always smooth, but as we reached each milestone along the way, TAF became increasingly proud of the accomplishments that made Year One of TAF Academy a remarkable success!



2008-2009 NARRATIVE SUMMARY

TAF Academy at FWPS opened with 127 students in 6th, 7th and 9th grades with a plan to add grades in middle and high school in each subsequent year until the school reaches full enrollment.

Prior to forming the partnership with FWPS, TAF spent most of 2006 in negotiations with another school district to launch the first Academy. When those conversations did not yield a workable agreement, Federal Way emerged as the next logical choice for the first TAF Academy because of the shared vision and familiarity between FWPS Superintendent Tom Murphy and TAF Executive Director Trish Millines Dziko. The two had previously served together on the board of the Digital Learning Commons.

The first challenge was to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between TAF and FWPS with the approval of their respective boards to release resources needed to explore feasibility and groundwork planning (i.e., facilities, curriculum, and staffing). In June of 2007, a formal "Community School Proposal" went before the FWPS board including documentation that defined the framework of TAF Academy Model. The proposal was unanimously approved by a vote of 5-0.

The next step was a deeper phase of planning to craft a Joint Operation Agreement (JOA) between TAF and FWPS. The JOA is the legally binding

RATIONALE FOR THE 6-7-9 GRADE CONFIGURATION

1. The 6-7-9 configuration affords the school a critical mass of teachers and students. This core group helps to sustain and build on the Academy culture as new students and teachers enter the Academy in subsequent years. Dramatic increases in the size of the student body or faculty have the potential to disrupt the momentum and process of building a positive school culture.
2. The 6-7-9 configuration allows key pedagogical structures of the TAF Academy model, such as multi-age classrooms and vertical learning structures whereby older students mentor, collaborate with and support their younger peers. Heterogeneous groups of students support each other's learning in meaningful ways such as collaborative problem solving, positive social interaction and cognitive apprenticeships.
3. The 6-7-9 configuration fosters a professional learning community of high school and middle school teachers who are trained and skilled in the pedagogy and specialized technologies of the TAF Academy. In subsequent years, these teachers become expert teacher-leaders for their peers in areas such as Project Based Learning and using teaching tools for the 21st century. Teacher-leaders reduce the overall cost of professional development and minimize the need for costly third-party professional development providers. .

agreement between TAF and FWPS that details the roles and responsibilities of each entity in the co-management of TAF Academy @ FWPS. Reaching this agreement was a tremendous milestone, not only for TAF, but for FWPS and several other organizations in Washington State who were seeking insight into how public-private partnerships might work. Because of the pioneering nature of this partnership, the negotiations were complex and time intensive. An unintended result of this extended process was that TAF and FWPS had much less time than was ideal to prepare the facility, hire and train staff and finalize the campus in time for the scheduled launch of the school in September 2008.

PRINCIPAL HIRING

It is widely known amongst small school practitioners that the number one determinant of a small schools' success is the principal. Additionally, during the exploratory phase of TAF's research into launching a new school, several small schools from across the nation reported that the best cases of school launches included a year of planning with the principal and a few teachers onboard to fine tune the curriculum and jump start the Professional Learning Community (PLC). As a result of the late signing of the JOA with FWPS, TAF Academy had to forego a planning year. This made it even more critical to identify an exceptional school leader to get TAF Academy off the ground on a relatively short timeline.

Finding that exemplary school leader was no small task. The role of a successful small school principal differs greatly from principals in traditional schools. Principals at small schools function first and foremost as instructional leaders, rather than mere supervisors, disciplinarians and district relations managers. Principals at traditional schools have relatively little time to devote to instruction beyond surface and punitive conversations with teacher. This is partly because traditional principals' days tend to be filled with interruptions and distractions, such as addressing students who are kicked out of class, parents who drop by the school unannounced and navigating district bureaucracy.

Knowing what was at stake, TAF's Director of Education worked closely with the FWPS central office to coordinate hiring the first TAF Academy Principal. The TAF/FWPS team was meticulous in selecting the right person for the task, not merely the candidate with the best credentials;

Mrs. Davis-Brown came to TAF Academy from Seattle Public Schools after serving the previous two years as an elementary school principal. She had the unique experience of working with a private-public partnership similar to the one established between TAF and FWPS. Moreover, it was in a small school setting. Her additional strengths were her success with improving outcomes in a school with a large minority student population and her ability to speak deeply about her support for teachers and how she held them accountable for high expectations. The areas in which she needed the most development were the prescribed TAF Academy instructional frameworks, including project-based learning (PBL) and authentic intellectual work (AIW), and working in a 6th-12th grade small-school setting which focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

less than
56%

Black and Hispanic
students graduating
high school on-time



Project-based learning
engages students

Unfortunately for TAF Academy at FWPS, the condensed timeline meant Mrs. Davis-Brown was not formally hired until March 2008, a mere six months before TAF Academy was expected to open. Adding another layer of complexity, Mrs. Davis-Brown remained under contract with her former district until July 2008. Nonetheless, Mrs. Brown worked closely with TAF's Director of Education in the evenings, on weekends and during as many spare moments of her vacation as time would allow. This was the only way to keep moving aggressively towards a successful launch of TAF Academy in September.

MAJOR SUCCESSES

- TAF worked closely with FWPS to identify candidates for the TAF Academy Principal and made a shared decision to select the instructional leader of the first TAF Academy
- The Principal demonstrated deep commitment to success of TAF Academy through her flexibility and willingness to work with TAF and FWPS around-the-clock to successfully launch the school

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Late signing of the JOA led to overall delay and compression in the schedule
- No planning year with Principal and key staff to achieve optimal success in first year
- The Principal initially had relatively little direct experience providing instructional leadership in prescribed frameworks such as PBL and AIW

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LESSONS LEARNED

- The rollout plan for future TAF Academies includes a timeline for major milestones such as signing the JOA, principal and teacher hiring, and contingencies for delays
- Leadership development plan for the Principal was developed to include additional network opportunities and site visits with other leaders of regions' and nations' most exemplary small schools

SCHOOL STAFFING

As one might expect, hiring teachers on short timeline with a brand new principal is very difficult. Nonetheless, TAF's Director of Education, the TAF Academy Principal and the FWPS Human Resources team worked together to source and interview candidates for nine open positions. But again, the late start on hiring was compounded by two additional factors:

1. TAF Academy has a unique subset of criteria for "qualified candidates"
2. The location of the school in Federal Way made the commute a challenge for some candidates living in Seattle

Generally speaking, teachers' roles in small schools tend to differ compared to those in traditional schools. Not only are small school teachers the frontline of instruction, but they are also expected to be

leaders and critical decision-makers on matters of student achievement. At TAF Academy, teachers are valued for their ability to structure lesson plans and supplement curriculum based on what is in their students' best interests. It is imperative that teachers manage their own efficacy through reflection and self-evaluation. TAF supports their work by providing ongoing professional development and ensuring access to multiple data sources to guide their instructional practice.

TAF Academy teachers ideally should be experienced practitioners deeply focused and reflective about their instructional practice. They should have experience teaching in a project-based learning (PBL) environment or have worked in a school-wide framework that supports authentic intellectual work (AIW) and data-driven instruction.

There is little room in the TAF Academy model for novice teachers to master the simple challenges of basic classroom behavioral management and to work out what many educators euphemistically call "first year jitters."

In fact, subsequent research and site visits to small schools in California showed a common best practice to require a minimum of three years of teaching experience as a prerequisite for employment. For example, at Impact Academy (Hayward, CA), recent graduates from teaching colleges showing potential are not hired, but instead referred to neighboring schools or strategic partners. They are then stewarded for the three-year period until they have established baseline classroom efficacy in the aforementioned areas.

Experienced teachers were our ideal candidates for the first cohort of TAF Academy teachers, but the early review of applicants produced few such candidates. We broadened our expectations, and after an intensive interview process, we started this academic year with nine full-time teachers. Four were in their first year of teaching and two had more than ten years of experience. None of the teachers had experience teaching in a project-based learning (PBL) environment or had worked in a school-wide framework that supported authentic intellectual work (AIW), two preferred requirements for the ideal candidate.

We were incredibly fortunate to have discovered a few self-described "diamonds in the rough," teachers who have shown great promise and enthusiasm for the basic elements of the TAF Academy framework. Moreover, from the first day of school, these teachers have worked to embrace the TAF Academy vision for what is possible in a new paradigm for public education and are committed to implementing the TAF Academy framework in their classrooms every day.

TAF Academy Staffing Model through 2012

		Math / Science	English / Social Science	Career and Technical	Foreign Language	Elective	Total FTEs
Grades Enrolled	6th, 7th, 9th	3	3	.5*	1	0.5	8
	6th - 10th	5	5	1	1	1	13
	6th - 11th	6	6	1.5	1.5	1	16
	6th - 12th	7	7	2	2	2	20

Our teachers were supported by an administrative staff that included the Principal, a full-time Instructional Coach and two office assistants. One office assistant worked half of her time as instructional aide for English Language Learners (a position she held at a neighboring elementary school).

To provide additional support, the TAF Education Team spent the bulk of their time on-site at the Federal Way campus. This included the TAF Academy Achievement Manager, Educational Technology Manager, Program Coordinator and a part-time Period 7 Coordinator who all received regular direction and support from the TAF Director of Education.

Of the nine teachers originally hired, seven will return for their second year at TAF Academy. In our research and interviews with other schools, a 77% retention rate appears to exceed the average retention rate of roughly 65% in other school startups. The threat proposed by high turnover is loss of school culture and increased professional development costs and time requirements due to training needed for new staff.

In 2009-10, TAF Academy will add two grades and 6-7 full-time employees, which means as many new teachers as returning teachers. The new to returning teacher ratio is offset by the nine returning staff and TAF employees who work on campus on a daily basis. This will add to the critical mass of returning faculty members on hand to provide stability and continuity to the learning community that was established in year one.

MAJOR SUCCESSES

- TAF and FWPS established a relationship and joint process for hiring inaugural TAF Academy teachers
- TAF staffed and retained seven teachers deemed suitable for the model and retained all TAF programmatic support staff essential to school support
- TAF Academy negotiated the exit of two teachers deemed unsuitable for the model with support of FWPS

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Initial teacher hiring pool did not have any "ideal" candidates based on the TAF Academy talent management model

- Inaugural staff lacked experience and exposure to PBL and AIW - the two root components of the TAF Academy instructional framework
- TAF did not have the human resource capacity to perform intentional, targeted identification and recruitment of specialized teachers and staff needed for optimal success for TAF Academy Year One

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LESSONS LEARNED

- TAF created a formal strategic plan for Talent Management and Leadership Development to identify, recruit, retain and subsequently develop teachers for the TAF Academy Network and is working to hire the first Talent Manger
- TAF sought and received support from Microsoft to help identify talent management and leadership development strategies from the business world that could be applied to our relatively unique needs

22%

Minority students graduating college eligible

Washington State has not updated high school graduation requirements since

1985



Juicy Jobs monthly career events

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The combination of a relatively inexperienced staff and a start-up school on a short timeline to opening day put increased pressure on TAF to support teachers as they became acculturated to the TAF Academy Model. Above all, TAF knew it had to create a culture of “high expectations” despite any short-term programmatic weaknesses due to the sheer novelty of the project. Professional development became our number one strategic priority, with a goal of building a professional learning community (PLC) working alongside our teachers to help them set high expectations for themselves as instructors and as classroom mentors.

The largest external support in this area came from outside consultants at the Buck Institute for Education (BIE). BIE is a national leader in project-based learning and has assisted with the launch of many of the nation's more successful networks of school including California's New Tech High (NTH) and High Tech High (HTH). In fact, BIE recently assumed leadership for professional development for the HTH network and has contracted to provide continued planning and implementation support to TAF as we expand the TAF Academy Network. Prior to the start of the year, they worked with our teachers in a week-long summer workshop on PBL instruction and assessment strategies and provided follow-up throughout the year with online support and one more site visits to TAF Academy. BIE also facilitated a site visit to schools in the San Francisco Bay area for some TAF Academy staff.

Additionally, the Small Schools Project and numerous individuals lent their support to reinforce and model strategies to better reach our students. Dozens of professionals also volunteered their support as authentic audiences to aide us in guiding teachers and their students to create rich, rigorous projects that had value and interest beyond the classroom. Without authentic audiences and feedback at student exhibitions, much

of our professional development efforts would not have resonated with teachers.

Site visits by media, executives from neighboring school districts and local organizations (e.g., Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Microsoft, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Nordstrom) also provided an element of professional support. Firstly, site visits increased transparency by allowing visitors to observe classroom practices and school activities firsthand. Their presence also offered much needed moral support to teachers entrenched in the rigors of school start-up activities.

Internal resources for professional development included the TAF Academy Instructional Coach, Principal and TAF Program Managers, who worked diligently with teachers to help the PLC gain momentum and offered feedback when they demonstrated new elements of the TAF Academy framework in their classrooms. Certainly there were initial fears, tensions and resistance to implementing some elements. One issue at the forefront was the need to balance the teacher's duty to exercise leadership in the classroom juxtaposed against TAF's need to maintain the integrity of academic model. Promoting consistency within the model was paramount to TAF until the teaching community had fully internalized the philosophies and best practices of the model. For this reason, TAF established protocols for small group and 1:1 conversations designed to elucidate and resolve problems of practice.

MAJOR SUCCESSES

- TAF Academy teachers met weekly with TAF staff and the TAF Academy Principal as part of their Professional Learning Community (PLC) to engage in meaningful conversations around instruction and student achievement at TAF Academy
- The TAF Academy Principal and Instructional Coach participated in research site visits to small schools in northern California. This trip was facilitated by the TAF Director of Education in partnership with BIE in response to their request to see real examples of “what success looks like.” The visit was a catalyst for mid-year adjustments to the TAF Academy school schedule, professional development strategies and teacher support that were initiated and owned by the Principal and Instructional Coach with TAF as facilitator.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Staff had insufficient time in a “traditional” school day to really allow deep collaborative planning, professional development and shared learning
- Initial professional development priorities were not clearly articulated and reflected in the professional development schedule – there was too much on the plate
- It was difficult to balance teacher leadership opportunities in their own professional development with the overall need to ensure the integrity of a new model

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LESSONS LEARNED

- TAF Academy teachers assumed increasing leadership roles in the PLC as the year progressed including leading and facilitating sessions and automating previously managed strategies like Critical Friends Groups
- TAF Academy teachers collaborated to create a “walk through” tool to help visitors and peers provide feedback to the school community on what they saw in classrooms.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Since TAF Academy is a public school, it must follow FWPS district enrollment guidelines. The school is located in FWPS's most diverse and need-based area, so the key for TAF and FWPS was to market the school in a way that would encourage students of color to apply.

From January to August 2008, TAF staff implemented several marketing strategies:

- Presented a workshop to the Totem Middle School 6th and 8th grade students
- Hosted an open house at Star Lake and Mark Twain elementary schools
- Canvassed area apartment complexes with flyers about TAF Academy
- Placed automated calls to families in the TAF Academy feeder area
- Mailed letters to each age-eligible family



1:1 computing on campus



Collaboration builds teamwork

Initial efforts to recruit students of color for TAF Academy had mixed results. TAF had great success reaching middle school parents and some of them flocked to the opportunity. Members of the Hispanic community in Federal Way particularly embraced the idea of having a school with high expectations, unique resources and a focus on college readiness. Their support and advocacy was instrumental in helping TAF reach higher number of Latino students and they even mobilized themselves to provide direct translation and outreach support to TAF. Many African-American parents also lent their services to help spread word-of-mouth support. In the end, we had more middle school applicants for both 6th and 7th grades than we could enroll which meant the applicants went into a random lottery to gain admission.

High school recruitment was all together different. Only eight applicants resulted from our initial recruitment efforts that had been so successful in filling the middle school slots, and we needed at least 25 of the 50 slots filled to rollout the ninth grade in our inaugural year. TAF quickly turned to a professional recruiting consultant who had deeper ties to the Federal Way community and had successfully recruited students for another small school start-up. The combined effort of the consultant, FWPS administration and TAF staff more doubled the number of applicants from eight to roughly 30 by the beginning of school but this was still well short of expectation.

Based on feedback students and parents those who declined to enroll, a big part of the recruitment challenge was that 9th grade parents generally allowed their students to have more control in their choice of school. For many students who were not used to rigor, we consistently heard that TAF Academy sounded like too much work! Additionally there was the “small school” challenge of not having the breadth of extracurricular activities and sports that larger traditional schools offer. Lastly, the TAF Academy campus is situated between another middle school and elementary school, and for some potential students this didn't seem to make for an authentic “high school” experience.

Nonetheless at the beginning of the school year, we had a student body of 127 that was representative of the area and came close to meeting our demographic goals. Demographically, the student body for the first year can be described as 30% Latino, 14% African American, 22% Asian, 2% Pacific Islander, 4% Multi-racial, 2% Native American and 26% Caucasian. Statistically, 55% qualified for free or reduced price lunch.

MAJOR SUCCESSES

- TAF worked closely with FWPS to launch grassroots community outreach to underserved communities in FWPS
- TAF Academy's 6th and 7th grades attracted so much interest, TAF held a lottery to determine enrollment

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- TAF lacked deep community ties to FWPS to consistently reach target demographic
- 9th grade enrollment was much lower than expected

EVIDENCES MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

- Events and activities are held to bring friends, parents and community members to see the TAF Academy difference; these events and activities are facilitated by current students and parents
- Attracting 9th grade students continues to be challenge but we are slanting our efforts towards building the 6th grade pipeline since we will not be recruiting 9th graders in mass after 2009-10

SCHOOL LAUNCH

TAF Academy Leadership went into Year One knowing that above all else, building a coherent culture of high expectations for students and teachers was a top priority. To do this, the TAF Academy Leadership Team needed to be mindful that the structures we put in place gave teachers and students the time and space to learn and reflect as individuals and a community.

Prior to the first day of school, TAF devised a short set of Year One Outcomes (see Appendix B) based on the TAF Academy Business plan

and 2-3 years of intensive research and study on effective small schools across the nation and consultation from our advisors and strategic partners. The outcomes were designed around aspects of school culture, structure and leadership with the intent to create a highly personalized learning environment where teachers knew each student and had the time, tools and space to support them in high academic achievement.

As the year began, TAF worked closely with the TAF Academy Principal and teachers to lay the foundation for structures and kick-off the first major project – a school-wide project that had students and teachers create and reflect on “norms” for what they wanted the culture to look and sound like at TAF Academy. As part of the project, each student created individual and group products that were assessed and exhibited to authentic audiences of stakeholders, ranging from donors and parent, to corporate partners. The project was an invaluable experience for all and was necessary to get so many people from diverse background calibrating around the Essential Question for the year: How do TAF Academy students and teachers work together to become an exemplary small school?



Breaking ground at TAF Academy - June 2008

In November, the Period 7 after-school program kicked off with an initial offering that included tutoring, marimba, chess, French and a technology club. Period 7 was an invaluable addition because it allowed our students to make in-depth connections and relationships with more teachers in the building and know students outside their own cohort. The broad offering of learning opportunities exposed students to new things and engaged them more deeply in the culture of the school. Perhaps the biggest challenge to Period 7 beyond mere funding for expanded program was transportation. Nearly a third of kids interested in program did not have transportation and district transportation was limited and shared with the neighboring middle school. Nonetheless, approximately 40 students participated in Period 7 program over the first year representing 30% of the student body.



Overall, the goal to launch a school culture of high expectation was a success, albeit the real challenge of how to work together to meet the high expectations that everyone agreed upon rest heavy on the shoulders of TAF, TAF Academy school leadership, teachers and even our students. It was an exciting and humbling introduction to the work that everyone had signed up for and the vast majority of stakeholders were earnest and steadfast in their efforts to bring the TAF vision to fruition.

MAJOR SUCCESSES:

- TAF Academy was successfully launched in FWPS with broad bases of support
- TAF Academy teachers developed a school-wide culture project and vision boards
- TAF staff provided programmatic support to TAF Academy staff and forged deep working relationships with teachers and principal including the acculturation of TAF Academy staff and students to the TAF Academy mission and vision



School Begins
September 4, 2008

- Baseline processes were established for shared-decision making between TAF Academy leadership, TAF and FWPS including processes for resolving “problems of practice.”
- TAF staff developed “Juicy Jobs,” a career awareness program that engages volunteer STEM professionals to help students explore and develop their own career interests
- TAF Parent teacher organization formed to support student achievement and administrative school functions

MAJOR CHALLENGES:

- Assessment data for incoming students wasn't provided prior to start of school and we were not able to complete our own data analysis of enrolled students until November
- Facilities and technology were not available as early as anticipated
- All parties were new to everyone else and to the TAF Academy model and relatively unfamiliar with district
- Control of the unexpectedly high flow of visitors to the TAF Academy campus including educators, foundation grant makers, university faculty, corporate employees, media and community members was difficult

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LESSONS LEARNED:

- The FWPS assessment calendar is now fully integrated with other school activities
- Teachers worked with TAF Academy Principal and TAF staff to develop a classroom “walk-through” tool for use by staff and visitors to assess whether a coherent school-wide culture of high expectations and shared instructional practices was evident through classroom observation and discussions with students and staff

1:1 COMPUTING: A SUSTAINABLE GOAL?

TAF is committed to the goal of maintaining classrooms with a 1:1 student to computer ratio because computer fluency goes hand-in-hand with being college-ready for today's graduating seniors.

To prepare students for a technology-driven world, 1:1 computer initiatives are popping up in public school districts across the country with varying degrees of success. Some states, including Michigan, Maine and Ohio, have even adopted statewide goals. They know that an increasing number of colleges require freshmen to purchase a computer to access course content, conduct research and complete assignments. While we acknowledge that many of these programs have been difficult to sustain, research emerging in the last few years confirms that successful introduction of a 1:1 computing paradigm is possible as long as two main criteria are met: (1) Strong strategic leadership from the district level in planning, rollout and maintenance and (2) A shared community vision of the scale and budget requirements (America's Digital Schools, Hayes/Greaves 2008). TAF is meeting those goals thanks to our strong partnership with FWPS and a technology-centered school culture that includes students, teachers and parents.

TAF is moving forward with a 1:1 computer ratio goal because access to technology is central to our mission and it is critical to the future success of our students.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Commit maintenance resources** – One of our early learnings about sustaining 1:1 computer classrooms was the constant need for tech support. TAF has dedicated a part-time school-based resource to address daily technology issues.
- **Build a learning community** – We are continuously communicating with technology leaders in local school districts who are exploring 1:1 computer ratio programs. We are also investigating partnerships with organizations and school districts nationwide that will foster an exchange of lessons learned.
- **Encourage responsible computer usage** – This fall, we are installing monitoring software that allows teachers to track student computer usage during class and promote good time management skills.

MID-YEAR ADJUSTMENTS

As winter break approached in December, it quickly became apparent that there was a need to reign in the various conversations and activities that we had engaged in over the course of the launch in order to focus more steadily on the academic program and organization capacity. Many of the conversations and activities were **divergent** and necessary to come to a shared understanding (calibrate) on a particular issue, to vet out potential opportunities in planning TAF Academy's implementation or simply to get something in place to move things forward. Divergence can be good for generative, brainstorming, "big picture" understanding and flexibility in getting things done.

Nonetheless, once the doors were open and filled with students and teachers, we shifted our attention from divergent thinking and activity that is useful in planning, to more **convergent** thinking to help focus deeply on implementation and ensure structures were concretely in place to support high academic achievement for every TAF Academy student.

To be intentional and to help accelerate our shift in thought and activity, we took a programmatic inventory of the then-current activity and operations, including deep reflection and debrief of the school launch. The positive highlights illuminated by the reflection were the spirit of collaboration, the success of the school wide culture project and the energy and enthusiasm shown by students. A key challenge that emerged from the reflection was the overwhelming flow of visitor traffic which was sometimes distracting and at times even disruptive for new teachers in a new environment. Additionally, teachers expressed discomfort with their own level of understanding of instructional methodologies and tools and requested more time for professional development - including training on the use of school wide rubrics and the Federal Way Gradebook application.

Subsequent to the reflection, the school community held numerous discussions around the gravity and threat of the challenges, and TAF Academy Leadership worked to create urgency and collaboration around finding resolutions without causing visceral panic. TAF's previous research and site visits set the expectation that part of the innovative process of launching an exemplary small school is to experience, quickly analyze, understand and develop solutions to programmatic challenges and threats to ensure that high expectations translate into high academic achievement for each student.

The school community understood this as well but was without the firsthand experience and research that TAF staff acquired. They wanted to know what success looked and sounded like beyond the shared readings and extensive professional development. In response to the school communities requests to see more of what success might eventually look and sound like at TAF Academy, the TAF Academy Principal, Instructional Coach and the TAF Director traveled to established small schools in the San Francisco Bay area to research and understand more clearly the range of strategies that could be used to increase the efficacy of teachers in their classrooms and shorten the ramp-up time for them to do authentic Project Based Learning and assessment.

The mid-year inventory and site visits to California culminated in a report that was shared with the TAF Academy staff and subsequently used by the TAF Academy Leadership to help assess our progress and guide our planning going into the latter half of the year.

MAJOR SUCCESSES:

- The Principal and Instructional Coach recognized the need for change in the school management strategies and proactively sought the support from TAF to help ideate solutions for challenges, resulting in mid-year research travel to small schools in California.

- Increased teacher and student engagement became evident through activities around student exhibitions and the work in the PLC, though the outcomes were not ideal

MAJOR CHALLENGES:

- The first round of exhibitions were of fairly poor quality and showed evidence of inefficient classroom and time management, and poor use of tools and techniques meant to engage students deeply in their projects and increase achievement
- School schedule did not initially reflect time and space for teachers to use planning time collaboratively across grades and content areas due to constraints around shared transportation and facilities with neighboring schools

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LESSONS LEARNED:

- Adjusted school schedule to create more flexibility and collaboration time for teachers
- Teachers openly discussed challenges around student exhibitions and increased their understanding of their role in preparing students to perform exemplary exhibitions

END OF YEAR MOMENTUM

Following the mid-year reflection, one of the first orders of business was to address the challenges around student exhibitions. Teachers met frequently with TAF staff and on their own to discuss and increase their understanding of how to use and manage classroom time to improve instruction, student engagement, and accordingly student exhibitions and learning.

Building data-literacy in the school was critical to the instructional improvement process, and now having a semester worth of student work to examine and the first round of FWPS district assessment data, teachers and TAF staff began having more data focused conversations around individual students' achievement and the strengths and weakness of each cohort. Teachers were able to be more thoughtful and intentional about their instructional content, project planning and strategies for increasing student performance.

A process was established whereby the TAF Student Achievement manager received data from the FWPS district and performed analysis to look for individual, cohort, strand, sub-groups and school wide trends. This information was shared with the instructional staff and TAF Academy leadership to ground everyone in the big picture and have shared understanding and urgency around areas in need of improvement, and those where we had been successful. From there, the TAF Academy instructional coach made recommendations on instructional modifications and strategies to address areas of need. The Principal helped ensure everyone in the building was accountable to the process and decisions, including regular follow-up and eventual evaluation. TAF Academy was able to use this process in the subsequent two district

assessments and each time improved the efficiency and turnaround time from actual assessment to the actual data informed instructional decision.

Furthermore, the school community agreed to try a different exhibition style – a “gallery walk” style where multiple students present at the same time and provide each other with peer evaluation alongside an authentic audience from the community of TAF Academy stakeholders. This style of exhibition mapped better to the student projects teachers had designed and worked well for students who expressed a desire for more freedom and input in the exhibition process. At the same time, the teachers redesigned the script for student-led conferences to facilitate dialogue that would accommodate the creation of e-portfolios and help track and illuminate student progress over the school year.

By the end of the year, despite the big picture challenges of a condensed planning year, relatively inexperienced teachers, lack of initial assessment data to guide instruction, rigid schedule constraints, and all the general complexities of launching a new school, the TAF Academy teachers, Principal and Leadership team were able to pull together to provide kids with amazing learning experiences both inside and outside the school day.

MAJOR SUCCESS

- An analysis of data revealed a slight upward trend in achievement in the core areas assessed
- Students participated in college visits
- TAF Academy staff developed an annual Career Day event

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- TAF Academy didn't finish initial data analysis in a timely way.
- TAF Academy staff provided a lower-than-ideal quality of instruction due to newness of program
- Developing a more strategic focus on all three aspects of college readiness by ALL on campus, not just role based
- The FWPS grade book system lacked appropriate grading criterion for tracking TAF Academy student work

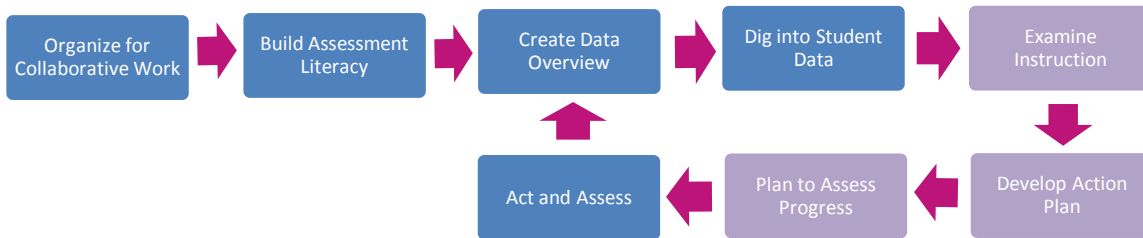
MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LEARNING

- TAF Academy staff has expanded the discussion around college and careers in student exhibitions
- The PTO has become an increasingly involved and collaborative component of the school community
- The school calendar has been revised to incorporate regular time to implement activities and reflect on all three aspects of college readiness
- The TAF Academy principal and instructional coach worked with FWPS to add TAF grading criterion to grade book

PLANNING AHEAD FOR 2009-2010

As TAF Academy grows to serve more students in Federal Way Public Schools, the use of data to drive instruction will play an increasingly important role in supporting high achievement for all students. With the successes, challenges and lessons learned from launch now in our rearview mirror, our approach moving forward is designed to build urgency around student achievement, improve teachers' instructional effectiveness, reach our school performance goals and ultimately ensure each TAF Academy student leaves our doors college ready. The chart below shows the TAF Academy cycle of assessment that will help guide collaborative efforts to use data to reach high student achievement in 2009-2010:

CYCLE OF ASSESSMENT



Based on the cycle of assessment ("Boudett, Kathryn Parker. (2005) Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Publishing Group."), last spring amid the backdrop of the work in the classroom and the artful chaos of student exhibitions, the TAF Academy Leadership Team began to organize and ramp up data-literacy efforts and proactively anticipate needs and challenges for the next year using data as the basis for decision making. In April, the school leadership team got a head start on planning a much improved summer professional development for new teachers based on lessons learned and teacher feedback and support from year one, including expanding the time allocated to building data literacy for new and returning staff.

In addition, it was determined using data that a summer program would be need for TAF Academy 9th graders to provide continuity and support needed to address unsatisfactory achievement in math and reading. In actuality, a school wide summer program was ideated but cost and time constraints forced school leaders to relegate the program to those with the most urgent need, and the 9th grader were a good pilot size.

Meanwhile, the math and humanities teams initiated a workgroup to look more deeply at scope and sequence of curriculum, including pilots of new High Achievement Learning Opportunities (HALO) mini-courses, project ideas and enrichment opportunities to be offered in the following year. TAF Academy Leadership viewed this as evidence of traction with professional development efforts aimed to help teachers take more ownership of their work and student outcomes. Empowered with a clear, shared vision for what success needs to look and sound like in 2009-10,

and now the baseline data and systems to support timely data-driven instruction, the TAF Academy Leadership Team is excited and confident that this year will be a groundbreaking year in which we move every student close to the goal of college readiness.

MAJOR SUCCESSES

- TAF Academy staff piloted the 4-week HALO courses to provide advanced learning opportunities to students and offer flexibility in an otherwise rigid schedule.
- The TAF Academy Support Coordinator with the support of the Student Achievement Manager planned and implemented the summer school program focused on reading and math achievement for 9th grade students.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Statewide WASL data is not available to schools until late into summer, almost too late to thoughtfully incorporate into 2009-2010 annual planning.
- TAF Academy staff realized early on that the time in the school day and in the traditional calendar for teacher planning and collaboration is not enough given the students and context of the problem we're trying to solve.

MAJOR EVIDENCES OF LEARNING

- A comprehensive plan for school achievement was developed that focuses on timely and effective use of data to inform instruction and decision making.
- Teachers are engaged as leaders and owners of the work to increase student achievement with full support and guidance from TAF Academy school leadership and TAF.
- The annual calendar including milestones for assessment, data turnaround, professional development and student exhibitions is already in place for 2009-2010.
- New teachers need to be on-boarded and acculturated into 2009-2010 plan and provided tools to meet expectations for use of data so they exceed last year inaugural output.

TAF

Pioneering a New Approach to Public Education



ACADEMY

METRICS FOR SUCCESS: BASELINE FOR RAPID IMPROVEMENT

This section provides an overview of assessment data and results from the 2009-2010 year for TAF Academy @ Federal Way Public Schools (FWPS).

TAF recognizes that given the current landscape and trends of public education, there is no silver to bullet to reversing the trend of low academic achievement for students of color. We came into this work knowing with our strong partnership with FWPS, it would take 3-4 years of using all of our skills, will and capacity to build relationships, understand and meet the needs of our students so they could achieve at their highest levels.

To that end, TAF chose 7th grade as our demonstration cohort and set a high bar; that TAF Academy 7th grade students WASL scores would exceed catchment area average by 15% across all subjects. While we did not come close to or realistically expect to meet the goal this year, we are confident we laid a foundation for high expectations that will allow us to meet that goal.

KEY DATA POINTS

Sixth and seventh graders at TAF Academy @ FWPS participated in the 2009 math and reading WASL, in addition to district course assessments for math computation and strand proficiency. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) cancelled the 9th grade WASL administration for 2009-2010, and similarly, FWPS recommended TAF Academy 9th graders not participate in FWPS district course assessments early in the school year due to logistics.

- 35.4% of 6th graders passed the math WASL
- 85.4% of 6th graders passed the reading WASL
- 45.2% of 7th graders passed the math WASL
- 61.9% of 7th graders passed the reading WASL
- 54.8% of 7th grader passed the writing WASL

SNAPSHOT OF 2008-2009 INCOMING COHORTS

TAF Academy teachers and leadership began the 2008-2009 school year without baseline data on its incoming cohorts of students. The first data analysis was completed in mid-October by the TAF Academy Achievement Manager using 2007-2008 WASL results which provided some, albeit not the most current and accurate, data for gauging student knowledge and skill mastery, and guiding instruction.

The October WASL analysis did however suggest relatively strong reading scores for incoming 6th and 7th grade cohorts with 84% and 81% of student meeting standard respectively in the previous year. Similarly, roughly 70% of 9th graders passed the reading WASL as 8th graders.

Math scores were not as promising. Only 54% and 73% of 7th and 6th graders met standards in mathematics in 2007-2008 respectively.

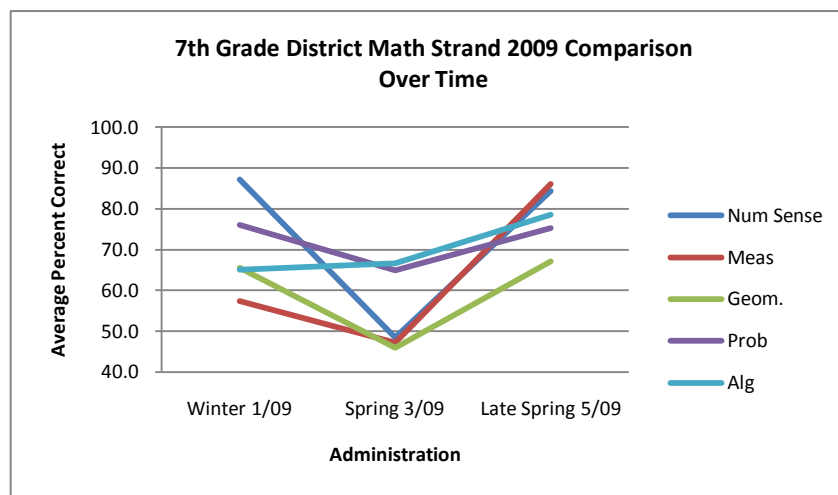
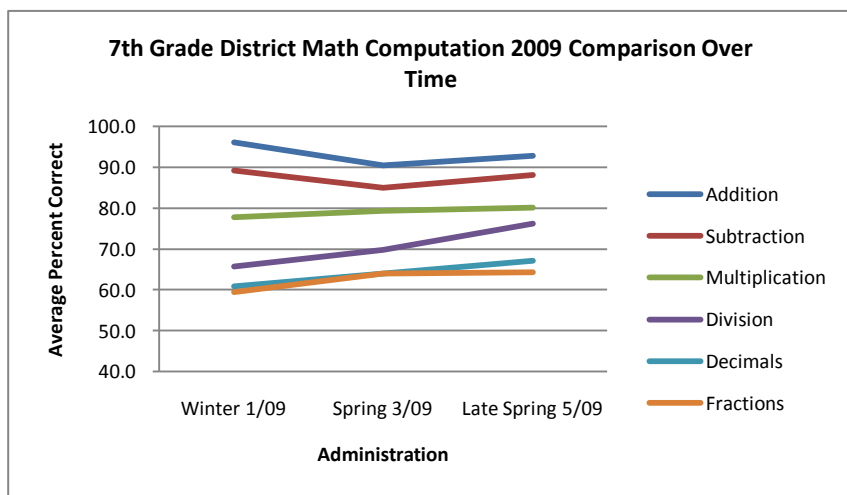
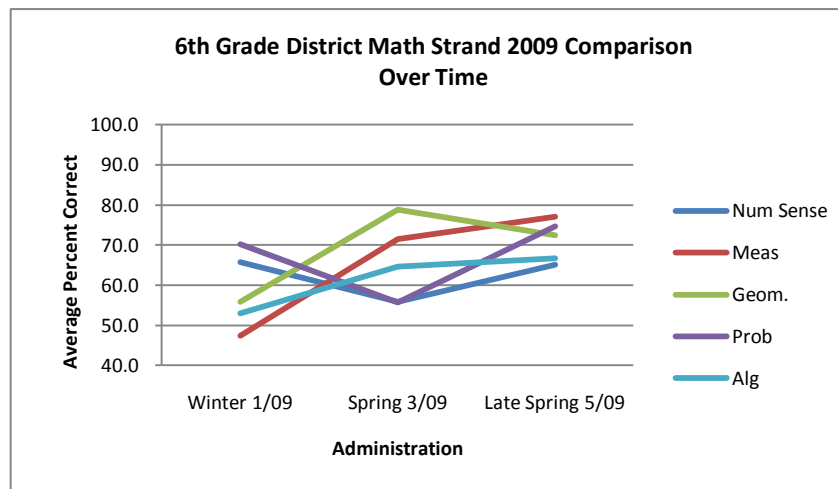
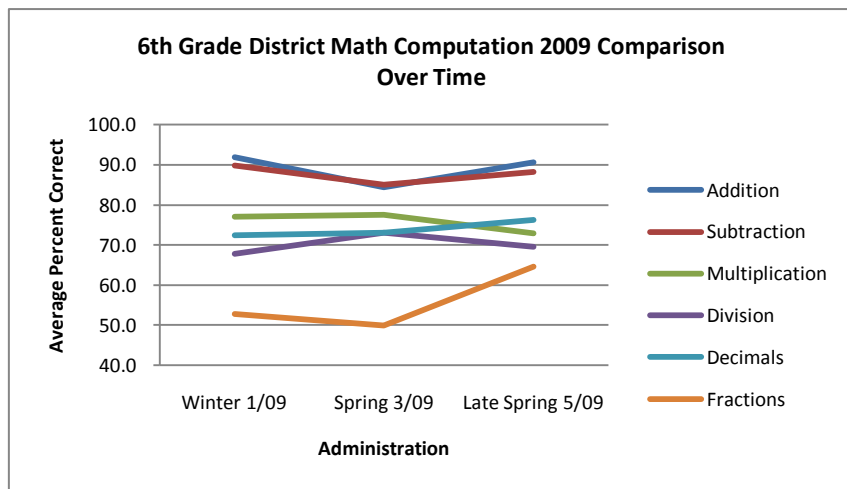
Meanwhile only 30% of ninth grade students met standard in the previous year.

FEDERAL WAY DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS

Outside of available WASL data from 2007-2008, FWPS course assessments were the primary assessment tool for data-driven conversations at TAF Academy during 2008-2009.

In 2008-2009, middle school students participated in three administrations of the district's math strand assessment and computation assessment; all except the fall administration due to school launch activities. Both math strand and computation assessments consist of approximately 30 multiple choice questions (depending on grade level) and are machine scored. Students are not allowed to use calculators on the assessments.

Assessment Results: The three data collections enabled us to monitor individual and cohort growth over 5 months (January through May). During that time period, we observed the following changes in student performance:



Because it was our first year to experience the district assessments, making connections between the district course assessment results and potential WASL performance was imprecise. However, beginning next year as TAF Academy collects more data, we will be able to more accurately correlate district assessment results to state standardized test to ensure students are on pace to meet or exceed required performance standards.

DISTRICT LITERACY ASSESSMENT

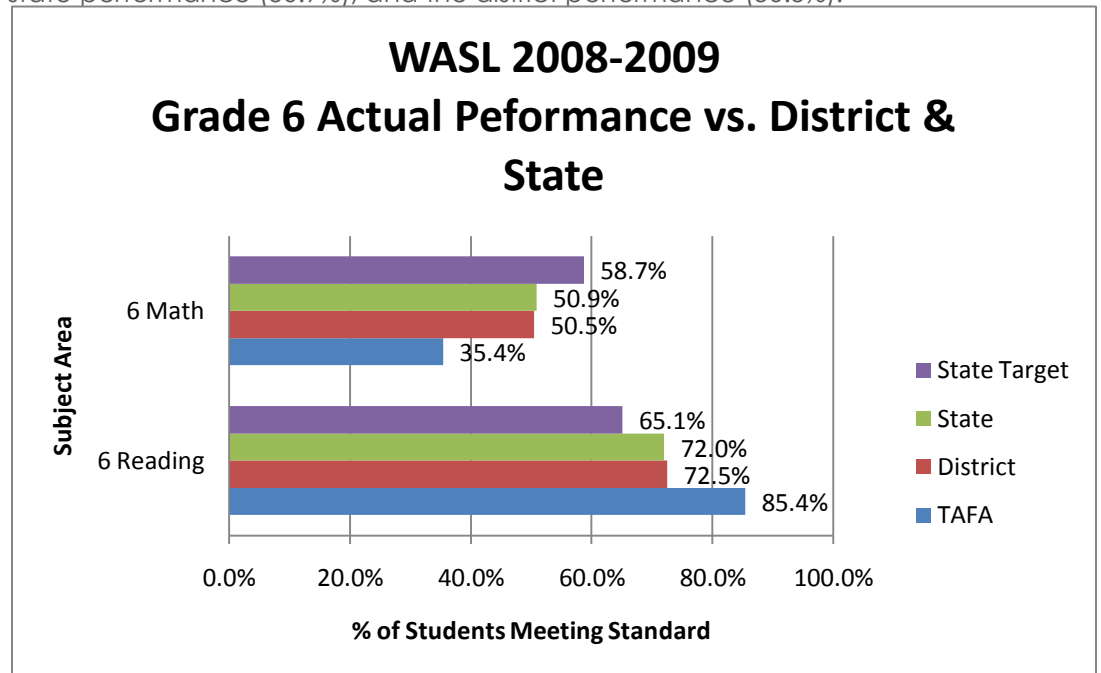
Last year, TAF Academy did not opt-in to the full breadth of district literacy assessment. This was partly due to the fact that the TAF Academy School Leadership Team was in start-up mode and still discovering what optional district assessment tools were available. Students took that Gates MacGinitie at the end of the year but we did .

Next year, the role of FWPS district level literacy assessments will increase as the district refines its literacy assessment program. In addition to the district's periodic administration of the Gates MacGinitie in 2009-2010, TAF Academy will administer three writing assessments during the 2009-10 school year for all students. Teachers will be able to use the writing samples to 1) monitor students' skills as cohorts and individual students and 2) calibrate grading practices in alignment with grade level expectancies.

6TH GRADE WASL PERFORMANCE

The 6th grade cohort performed exceptionally well in reading and considerably lower in math. However, 6th grade scores count toward TAF Academy's overall calculation for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

A little more than a third of the 6th grade cohort (35.4%) met standard on the state math test. This was significantly below the state target (58.7%), state performance (50.9%), and the district performance (50.5%).

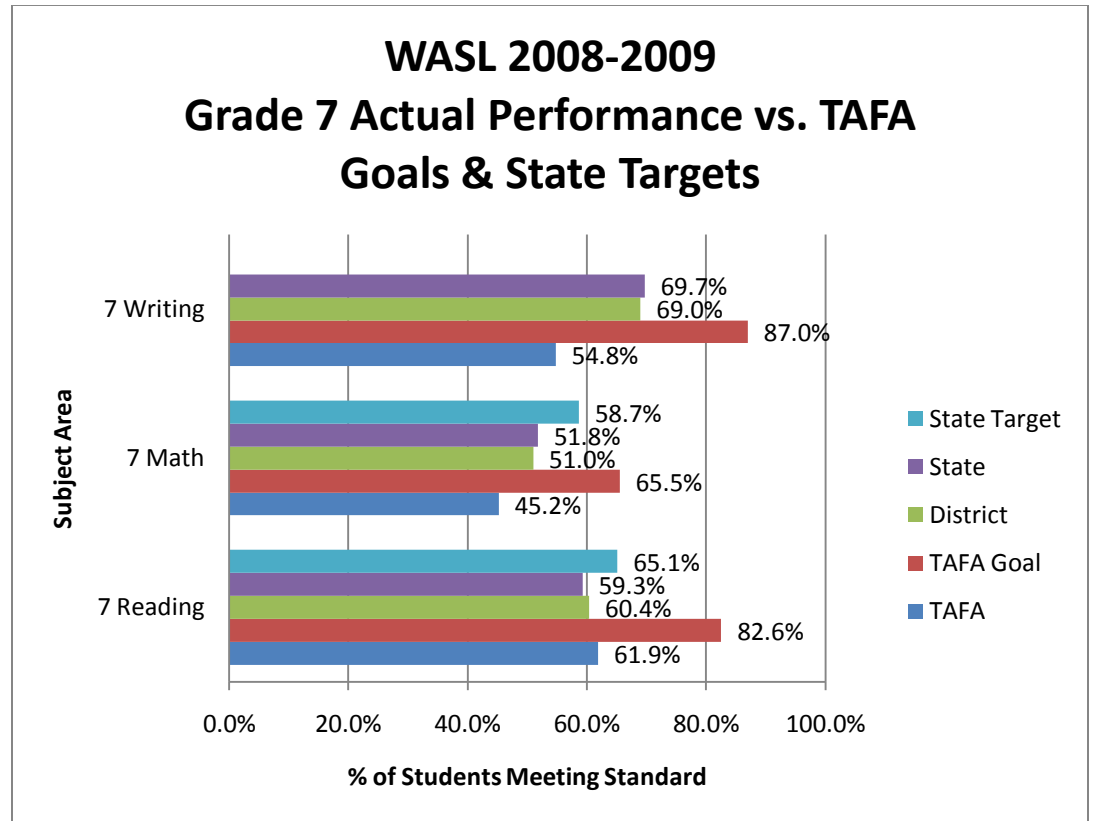


In contrast, more than 85% of TAF Academy 6th graders met standard on the state reading test. They exceeded the state target (65.1%) by nearly 20% and scored 13% higher than the district (72.5%) and state (72%).

We used 2007-2008 WASL data to calculate the percentage of 6th graders who had met standard on WASL as 5th graders. We were able to determine that 84.1% of the 6th grade cohort met standard on the reading test and 72.7% of the cohort met standard on the math test the previous

year. A spring to spring comparison for the 6th grade cohort shows minimal growth in reading and a significant decline in math performance from their 5th grade to 6th grade year. In reading, the percentage of students meeting standard stayed mostly the same showing a small increase from 84.1% to 85.4%. In contrast, the percentage of students in this cohort meeting standard on the math test dropped from 72.7% in 2008 to 35.4% in 2009.

7TH GRADE WASL PERFORMANCE



TAF Academy’s 7th grade cohort performed below the district average in math and writing and performed slightly better than the district average in reading. The cohort missed the foundation’s performance goals by 20 to 30%. In writing, 54.8% of TAF Academy 7th graders met standard – which was approximately 14% below the district and state performance (69% and 69.7% respectively). In math, the 7th grade cohort did not meet the state goal (58.7%) or foundation goal (65.5%) and performed just below the district (51%) and state (51.8%) with 45.2% of the cohort meeting standard. In reading, 61.9% of TAF Academy 7th graders met standard which was slightly better than the district (60.4%) and state (59.3%). However, they performed below the state target (65.1%).

TAE

Pioneering a New Approach to Public Education



2009-2010 STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR TAF ACADEMY

The Technology Access Foundation (TAF) plays an active role in the day-to-day planning, implementation, management and monitoring of TAF Academy at Federal Way Public Schools. Each year we set a short list of strategic goals that reflect the most critical work areas in need of improvement. The key strategic initiatives for 2009-2010 academic year is as follows:

1. Student Achievement
2. Talent Management
3. Program Management

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The theory of action around student achievement at TAF Academy is: If teachers are able to interpret student performance data in a timely and meaningful way, they will be able to adjust their instructional practices, with support from building leadership, to positively impact student achievement.

All math teachers will participate in at least two site-based data meetings focused on their cohort of students in addition to the district's data days during the 2009-2010 school.

The TAF Academy Achievement Manager will facilitate at least two sessions of academic updates for a combined audience of the TAF Education Team and the TAF Academy Leadership Team.

All literacy teachers will participate in at least two site-based data meetings focused on analyzing writing samples in order to calibrate grading practices.

After discussing the data, teachers are expected to be responsive to student needs based on the evidence. The school's Instructional Coach, Principal and the TAF Academy Achievement Manager are resources to the teachers in brainstorming strategies for instructional change. The Principal is responsible for holding teachers accountable to the changes needed to improve student performance.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

The concepts of talent management and leadership development are ideas borrowed from the corporate world whose integration into public education is being considered increasingly vital, particularly for staffing urban and low income districts.

Quality teachers have consistently been identified as one of the most important determinants of student achievement, suggesting that the implementation of a comprehensive talent management system could be a tremendously worthwhile and rewarding HR endeavor.

The implementation of an effective leadership development program is also necessary for the school to prepare exceptional instructors for leadership positions. This means opening up curricular and organizational

decisions to teacher input, facilitating collaboration between teachers and administrators and equipping highly capable teachers to assume leadership roles when necessary. This is of particular importance to the long-term TAF Academy vision, which involves the opening of more schools with more leadership positions to fill.

The drawback to these talent management practices is that almost all of them require significant investments of time and money. However, particularly for a school with the high standards and specific staffing needs of TAF Academy, the benefits of implementing these types of programs are likely to outweigh the costs.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Explanation of TAF programmatic support for TAF Academy based on Gates Intermediary Assessment support tool.

Program Title	Program Lead	Program Description
Student Achievement	Program Manager	Manages projects and operations to provide academic support and enrichment based on student and school data. Includes oversight of TAF's interest in collection and reporting of student data for all stakeholders.
Educational Technology	Program Manager	Manages projects and operations to support effective use of technology to promote high academic achievement at TAF Academy. Includes planning, training and rollout of classroom and administrative technologies, and coordination thereof.
Talent Management	Program Manager	Manages projects and operations to identify, recruit, hire and retain highly qualified teachers and staff for the TAF Academy Network. Includes leadership development and continuous learning opportunities.
Program Efficacy and Replicability	Education Director	Provides strategic planning and direction of TAF's effort to launch and support the TAF Academy Network. Includes ongoing programmatic development such as determination, direction and evaluation all programs to support high academic achievement for each student at TAF Academy.
Fiscal Stability	Development Director	Manages TAF's effort to raise or gain access to capital to ensure ongoing operation of each TAF Academy. Includes securitization of reserves to fund projected operations for a minimum of one year.

APPENDIX A – SAMPLE OF STUDENT PROJECTS FROM 2008-2009

Winter Session

Grade	Subject	Project	Output
9 th	Social Studies	Students investigated the effects of the casino and gaming industry on a Northwest Tribe.	Students created an Informational Briefing for Washington Senator Maria Cantwell where they included their findings and made proposals to solve concerns and issues. In addition students met with a representative of Maria Cantwell where they discussed, in person, their findings, asked probing questions and were given feedback.
9 th	Science	Students examined how TAF Academy can be a more “green” campus. Ninth grade students collected, sorted and quantified the garbage generated at TAF Academy.	Students prepared an education product that encouraged recycling and reducing the amount of refuse. In addition, in the 2009-2010 school year they will introduce language in the TAF Academy Norms that will make TAF Academy a green campus.
7 th	Geography	Students presented world regions. They researched various world regions and their features.	Students presented the information they discovered on climate, landforms, etc. and explain how that region affects their life, and how moving to that region would change their lives.
7 th	Science	The 7th grade math/science classes spent several weeks studying diabetes and its effect on Americans of all ages. They delved deeper into one of the driving questions “Why should we care?” One of the many things they learned was the importance of a healthy diet to prevent Type 2 Diabetes.	For a final product, one class chose to create cookbooks that are not only diabetic-friendly, but kid-friendly as well. Recipes are included for breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert and snacks. Another class chose to create Public Service Announcements as a way of informing others about the current epidemic that is Diabetes. Students presented Public Service Announcements in various forms of their choosing (i.e. television spots, radio spots or posters).

<p>6th</p>	<p>Geography</p>	<p>Business leaders were briefed on important information about different regions in the world as they prepare for business trips.</p>	<p>Students acted as staff assistants as they shared briefing books, time zone clocks, wall maps and interactive maps. Audience members learned about exchange rates, business meeting etiquette, proper dress, foods to expect and many more interesting topics as students also evaluated important focus areas and current events.</p>
<p>6th</p>		<p>The 6th grade students presented solutions to water scarcity and uncovered the answers to the following questions: How is water managed in Federal Way? Who uses water? What is water used for in our lives? Where does water come from? Why must we respect and conserve this precious resource? How can this be done?</p>	<p>Students produced print material (posters, brochures, etc.) that raised awareness around water conservation. Students gave a presentation to the student body and members of the community. These materials were later posted on the school campus and given to parents</p>

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