



State of Arizona
Department of Education

January 23, 2019

Purpose of Visit: CSI and F letter grade visit

School: Rhodes Junior High School

Visit date: January 10, 2019

Support and Innovation Unit

Summary of site visit:

Education Program Specialist (EPS) Jennifer Cooper facilitated a school site visit on January 10, 2019. An extensive interview with Patty Christie – Principal, Joan Wilson – Assistant Principal, and Cathy Beaudoin – Title I Specialist, was conducted to discuss the school's current school improvement practices which impact student outcomes, successes and challenges faced by the school, school improvement goals, and next steps. Progress on the site's Integrated Action Plan was also discussed, student and teacher focus groups were held, and classroom instruction was observed. A leadership team meeting was held which included site leadership and district leadership including the Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, two Assistant Superintendents, two Executive Directors, and a Director.

Summary of interviews and meeting discussions:

Rhodes Junior High School is a Title I school that serves about 950 students in grades 7 and 8. Ms. Christie has been the principal at Rhodes JH for three years now. She is supported by an assistant principal, Title I specialist, a site guiding coalition team, and a site leadership team. The school uses the district created ELA curriculum and the Big Ideas math program. The district provides a half day of professional development each quarter, three early release days for grading, and a late start every Wednesday to allow for an hour of PLC time. The school saw about a 50% turnover in staff this year.

Rhodes to Success - The school is divided into 5 interdisciplinary teams that include electives, special education and Title I intervention; two seventh grade teams, two eighth grade teams, and a 7/8 gifted team. The school operates on a 5-day rotation with every Wednesday reserved for clubs, social emotional learning, and school wide programs. Every 5th day each team has an elective day which allows for content teachers to have a full preparation day to plan for cross-curricular connections for students and to discuss flexible groupings based on formative data. Two advisory blocks occur daily in which meditation/yoga, community circle, personalized learning time, team building, and mentoring take place. The teams collaboratively plan for session days to provide direct instruction and flex days where students receive extra support with the content. Content team meetings are held on Wednesday mornings to review curriculum and data. Currently the 7th grade is involved in a pilot of Summit Learning.

The principal has built a new vision and mission for the school this year with her guiding coalition and feedback from her faculty and site council. This has been shared with her students and parents and communicated through the school website and on daily announcements. The principal models high expectations for her staff and students, is child-centered, and is focusing on academic improvement in conjunction with social and emotional learning. The school is using Restorative Justice practices and is seeing success with these strategies. Administration uses the Danielson framework to evaluate staff and

provides staff with regular feedback from classroom walk-throughs to create instructional targets to focus on. The principal feels well supported by the district.

The school was notified in November of its 2018 state accountability letter grade of F. Requirements for this statute were reviewed as well as the designation as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement school due to the F letter grade. The CSI grant opportunity was discussed. The school was also notified in November of its federal accountability designation as a Targeted Support and Improvement school for the subgroups of Students with Disabilities and EL students. TSI requirements were reviewed, and the TSI grant opportunity was discussed.

Classroom Observations:

ADE classroom observations are brief, however, provide a general snapshot of; classroom environment, academic rigor, student engagement, teacher engagement, monitoring of student learning, teacher providing appropriate and specific feedback to students, effective questioning strategies, posted objectives, success criteria, evidence of academic learning (posted high quality work) etc.

The school principal, assistant principal, Title I specialist, and EPS observed the instruction of 8 classes, including electives and an intervention group. Average class size was about 30 students.

Overall strengths noted were:

- well managed classrooms and smooth transitions between classes.
- teachers engaged with students in delivering instruction and proximity to students.
- students were compliant and on task.
- lesson goals were posted, and instruction was aligned to the posted goals.
- evidence of the school's PBIS expectations.
- an appropriate balance of direct instruction, student practice, and student technology use.
- interventionists pushing in to classes supporting the core instruction.
- evidence of teacher collaboration on the team and within their content areas.

Overall, teachers used high levels of academic language in their lessons. It is recommended that staff stretch students to use the academic vocabulary as well through structured student to student interactions. Continue to work with staff to ensure that higher levels of rigor are being planned for in their lessons.

Teacher Focus Group:

Staff enjoy the interdisciplinary focus of the school, the flexible groupings of the students and schedules, the commitment to each other, the teamwork, and the data tracking to focus on students' skills. Staff shared they have opportunities to plan as a team and also as a department. They feel the climate of the school is very positive and student focused. The focus is on teaching for mastery and they are seeing an increase in student accountability. Staff feel they have opportunities to provide input on school level decisions and that the site leadership involves many stakeholders. Staff stated they receive meaningful feedback regularly from the principal and that she is open, receptive, and approachable. They appreciate that the principal knows the evaluation tool so well that she can provide real feedback based on the rubric. When asked what staff would like to change or add to the school, responses included: more community engagement, lower class size, reducing special education caseloads that are over the district cap, and support with managing the 4-hour ELD block within their schedules.

Student Focus Group:

Students enjoy the lunch program, Success Wednesdays, elective days, sports opportunities, and being on a team. Students shared that the teachers and all staff are always available to help them when needed. They feel the staff is always positive, respectful, and check in with them. Students shared the expectations for learning at the school are to get good grades, demonstrate good behavior, use your time wisely, be respectful, and participate in class. Many of the students use

the online portal to check their grades. The students feel the school is a safe place to learn but are concerned with some fights that sometimes happen after lunch. Students see their parents using the online portal to check their grades and report that there is email communication between their teachers and parents. When asked what the students would like to change or add to the school, responses included: having electives on the same day each week instead of rotating, having regular football instead of flag football, and to keep the STEAM schedule from changing so frequently. The students shared that the school is a great place already and they did not have many suggestions for improvement.

Leadership Team Discussion:

The site leadership team shared a data presentation which included teacher and student attendance data, the reduction of discipline incidents, AzMERIT and AIMS Science trends, and STARS benchmark data. The school is seeing attendance rates increasing and discipline referrals decreasing. The team has identified math as a schoolwide area of focus for professional development and tutoring.

District leadership feels the principal has a growth mindset, the ability to embrace creative thought, and has developed strong teams on the campus. It is evident that the school has a clearly defined vision and buy-in from the staff with a focus on students. District leaders are concerned with the amount of work that the teacher leaders engage in and the ability of the district to replicate the success of the team should there be turnover. The principal is provided weekly check ins from district cabinet members and is allowed flexibility to meet the specific needs of her campus. The district expects the school to continue to focus on developing strong teachers, to keep the moral compass pointed north, and to maintain engagement in the continuous improvement process. Ms. Christie requested support from the district in promoting her school's programs within the district to overcome misperceptions. It would benefit the district to not only have the 6th grade students roll up to learn about the junior high's programs but also the 6th grade teachers.

Progress on Integrated Action Plan:

The school identified their top needs as:

- 2.3 teachers intentionally planning instruction that supports all students (focusing on 7th and 8th grade math and the EL and special education subgroups).
- 5.2 staff create an environment which builds mutual respect among leadership, teachers, students, and families.

Progress made on the corresponding school improvement action steps are noted below:

Principle 2: Third quarter a common lesson planning approach for math will be adopted; district specialists and Summit coaches are working with staff to unpack standards and to discuss math data and instructional strategies; Summit weekly calls are taking place; District content specialists visit weekly to work with collaborative teams and to coach teachers; engagement strategies are being revisited to support the EL and special education subgroup achievement; release time for planning has been scheduled for EL and special education teachers

Principle 5: Restorative justice training is being completed along with a book study; 7-mindsets training has been completed; TRIBES training has been completed; 7-mindsets curriculum is being implemented to teach social-emotional skills

Next Steps:

- Consider adding science to your benchmark assessments to monitor student progress in this content area as it is assessed annually by the state in 8th grade.
- Continue to engage staff in the unpacking of their content standards in conjunction with the performance level descriptors for their grade level to ensure lessons are being designed to match the level of rigor needed to demonstrate proficiency.
- Work with your staff to increase the levels of structured academic discourse in all classes.

- Continue to disaggregate your EL and special education subgroup data, and research and implement evidence-based practices to increase the achievement of these students.
- Begin to plan ahead for FY20 and identify when you will complete your Comprehensive Needs Assessment, root cause analyses, and your new Integrated Action Plan. All items are due May 1, 2019. Consider applying for the CSI grant.

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