

School Improvement Plan
Narrative Overview

SOTA High School

PROGRESS TOWARD PREVIOUS YEAR'S GOALS
2009-10

Our students' progress in the area of Reading, as measured by the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE), demonstrated overall that our students' scores have slightly dropped from 2009. Students in grade 10 performed at 87.7% of students meeting standard in Reading. We did not achieve the expected results. We are not satisfied with our current indicators of growth on the HSPE and are therefore intentionally focusing our efforts to significantly improve our students' achievements in this area. We look to higher achievement as measured by the 2011 HSPE.

In the area of Mathematics, our students' scores have slightly dropped from 2009. Students in grade 10 performed at 48.4% of students meeting standard in Mathematics. We did not achieve the expected results and we see a significant area of improvement needed. Our student's performance as measured by the 2010 HSPE did not meet our established targets. A significant emphasis on mathematics, along with many layers of support across our school district and within our school in order to effectively address the concerns in this area is needed if we are to see a significant increase in the level of student performance in mathematics as measured throughout the school year with formative assessments and in a summative manner on the 2011 HSPE.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
2010-11

Purpose: To strategically focus our goals of community, empathy, balance, and thinking to achieve student success.

The Tacoma School of the Arts is built around a particular vision: We believe that students make the most of their education when they take ownership of their education- when students intentionally choose to take on the challenge real learning entails. We further believe that this ownership most naturally develops within a learning community, encouraged by others who share that commitment.

We are committed to integration; we want students to see their learning, their world, and their lives whole. Thus we seek to help students make connections within academic disciplines, between the academics and the arts, between their lives now and their lives as they enter the larger global community in a very few years.

With this holistic vision firmly in mind, we also believe students deserve the opportunity to go deep- to develop and pursue a particular passion at increasingly greater depth, guided by mentors in our community who can encourage excellence.

The content of this plan represents the ongoing work and goals established within our school for the 2010-2011 year. The goals and strategies in this plan represent and are influenced by the ongoing work of our staff members within grade level teams and as a part of whole-staff work sessions. The specifics of our Action Plan set forth our school-wide reform efforts and are a result of our staff's review of student assessment data, the prioritization of staff and team goals, and the articulation of specific next steps in our work toward student achievement.

In the area of mathematics we have a Friday grade level pullout where the sophomores work with their math and science instructors to review math concepts and to prepare them for the upcoming HSPE. We also have district training for our math instructors. They will participate in a "Teacher Development Group" activity and it also includes studio classroom time. This gives math teachers time to refine their teaching techniques to better help students learn. There is also after school math tutoring for all levels of mathematics.

In reading, we also have a Friday grade level pullout where juniors work with their humanities instructors to better help them with reading and writing. We also have district training for our humanities instructors. They will participate in a "College Prepared Program" activity and it also includes studio classroom time. This gives humanities instructors time to refine their teaching techniques, help other instructors, so everyone can better help students learn.

Review of Data to Establish Improvement

Achievement

Spring Data (expressed as a percentage of students meeting standard)

Grade 10	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading	90.1	93.0	87.1	92.6	87.7
Mathematics	47.5	64.1	46.3	51.7	48.4
Writing	86.4	93.5	95.9	95.4	95.0
Science	37.7	58.9	47.1	53.7	57.1

The school-wide data from the 2010 HSPE score of 87.7% indicates a strength in Reading performance, but our goal is 100%. Our work in this area continues to be teachers coming together to review student work and reviewing ongoing formative assessments to make instructional decisions that support student learning in the classrooms, and layers of intervention that are in place with our grade level pullouts, teacher professional development in best practices, and our reading across the curriculum.

In the area of Mathematics, our students' HSPE performance was 48.4% and this is an area we are focused upon changing since our goal is 100%. Our instructional focus in this area is the implementation of grade level pullouts, Teacher Development Training, afterschool tutoring, and the placing level 1 and 2 students in a math tutoring class so they have an extra contact time with a supportive math instructor. We work to increase the level of academic success in mathematics. The District's support of this work with the infusion of math coaches, ongoing professional

development for teachers, coaches and principals combined with our school's weekly grade level collaboration sessions and the development of intervention and enrichment plans to respond to student achievement will all contribute to the work designed to significantly and positively influence our students' achievement.

Attendance

(Average daily attendance)

2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
96.3%	98.1%	97.4%

Dropout

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
1.7%	1.5%	1.4%

Graduation

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
On-time	93.2%	94.9%	94.1%
Extended	99.8%	94.9%	97.1%

College

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
College Direct	50%	59%	56%	58%	69%
College Direct 2-year	23%	32%	27%	22%	32%
College Direct – 4 year	26%	27%	33%	40%	37%
Persistence Rate	74%	63%	86%	74%	88%

Planning for Transitions

Sophomores enter SOTA as full members of the community. They become part of the humanities core, sitting alongside juniors and seniors. Students take on math and science courses at their appropriate level. They may take Spanish classes. In terms of art electives, they are expected to build a broad foundation, experiencing a range of essential courses in music, visual art, drama, and dance.

Juniors move deeper into the community. In addition to their academic core classes, they are encouraged to find a focus in the arts and take classes that broaden and deepen their craft. The senior year at SOTA should end with a bang, not a whimper. As a culminating experience of their high school education, seniors will be expected to finish strong academically, of course, and pursue their arts focus at great depth.

Finally, seniors must take on the Areté project. This senior project creates opportunities within a student's daily schedule to pursue a personal, well-defined goal. The Areté project, an individualized plan designed by each student with the help of appropriate faculty, and approved by a panel of staff and community members, may take the form of an internship, an exhibition, a

research or community service project, or a production.

Characteristics of High Performing Schools

We are moving forward in each of the nine areas of school improvement as outlined by the state, however there are three that emerge as needing particularly attention in this year's work. A **Clear and Shared Focus** is promoted through the strong alignment by all staff about our beliefs and values about working with our students. We are all committed to standard based instruction and are making positive changes to implement standard based grading. We are also focusing on differentiating instruction since all our classes are multi-grade level and we have a total inclusion environment.

We work continually on promoting **High Levels of Collaboration and Communication because of our weekly two-hour staff meetings, Professional Learning Communities, Mentor Project Groups, and staff leadership opportunities.** We will address this characteristic through formal structures such as our weekly two-hour collaboration time that is built into the Friday school day that includes PLC time, and regularly scheduled department chair meetings. Our Mentor Project Groups allows students and teachers to take leadership roles at our school. They organize and implement many activities. We also want our staff to take on leadership roles. We are one team that works to help each other to help students succeed.

Another area we are focusing our efforts is on Focused Professional Development. We have designed our Action Plan and planned our Professional Development to work in conjunction. We also collaborate with the Science and Math Institute and Stewart Middle School to create informal strategies for regularly communicating and working interdependently with all staff about school-wide initiatives, teaching and learning goals, daily routines and procedures, and connecting with our school community.

Various staff members participate in district and state level leadership opportunities in order to bring the work back to our entire staff and lead particular ventures. In these larger, and in daily small situations, staff members are empowered and take the initiative to make decisions and move our professional work forward for the benefit of students and their learning.

Professional Development Opportunities

A great deal of SOTA staffs' learning is a result of our teachers coming together at our weekly two-hour staff meetings. It is here where instructors are in Professional Learning Communities and they focus on how to improve their practice.

We have also imbedded in our calendar our six professional development days so all our instructors can come together. This year our focus has been on standard based instruction and grading.

We have also teamed up with the Science and Math Institute (SAMi) and Stewart Middle School in order to implement strategies to help students succeed.

Our math instructors participate in “Teacher Development Group” professional development activities, including studio classroom. This allows the instructors from different schools to work together to better math instruction.

Half of our Humanities instructors volunteered to participate in the Tacoma School District’s “College Prepared Program” professional development activities, including studio work. This allows the instructors from different schools to work together to better literacy instruction.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Leave Blank for CAB Title I staff to complete.

Recognition of Non-Academic Learning

At SOTA, we believe in educating the whole student. This belief is demonstrated by a strong emphasis on creating a focused, structured, and nurturing environment. One area where this occurs is in SOTA’s Mentor Project Groups. These are teams of students and teachers that are assigned a variety of school projects that allow them to work collaboratively to accomplish the many things required to develop and build a strong community.

Mentor Project Groups provide students with the ability to take on various projects working collaboratively to ensure they are completed on time within the defined scope and at the quality standard set forth. The ability to do this effectively directly translates into job skills that a student can apply to the work environment.

Mentor Project Groups (MPGs) require an understanding and application of project management methodology and processes. Project management is the discipline of organizing and managing resources in such a way that these resources (people) deliver all the work required to complete a project within defined scope, quality, time, and cost constraints. In other words, proper planning and implementation of a process and requirements will ensure that the project is completed on time and at the level of quality expected by the SOTA learning community.

Mentor Project Group time is built into the schedule on Fridays to build a community where staff and students are committed to the development and ownership of our school and its operation. There are various aspects that make up Fridays that help to shape it as one of the most important days during our scheduled school week.

Fridays are comprised of several components; no one is more important than the other but each contributes to the success of building our community. We have staff meetings in the mornings followed by MPG groups and on occasion, student showcases. The MPG groups play a critical role in the building of our school community.

Safe and Supportive Learning Environment

The SOTA staff is purposeful and intentional in its work to create a safe and supportive environment. SOTA classes meet in many locations across Tacoma’s downtown core in renovated business spaces, in cultural and arts facilities, and in University of Washington

Tacoma's classrooms. Students have special access to the Washington State History Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, Museum of Glass and University of Washington Tacoma library. All-school events are often held at the historic Urban Grace Church. Students move between these spaces using Pierce Transit buses and Tacoma's Link Light Rail.

SOTA's performing arts center in the renovated Ted Brown Music building on Broadway in the theater district. This space houses a dance studio, black box theater, a recording studio, vocal and instrumental music, classrooms and several soundproof practice rooms. SOTA's performing arts center is a community resource offering rehearsal and performance venues for a variety of arts and cultural organizations.

Equity Issues

- 1) Promote and provide peer and teacher tutoring before school, during lunch, after school, Friday mornings
- 2) Scaffold assignments for at-risk students
- 3) Decode directions and instructions for assignments
- 4) Pair at-risk students with Bridges (peer tutors) and peers
- 5) Provide small class sizes
- 6) Develop and deliver lessons that meet the state learning standards. Focus on standards-based instruction and assessment.
- 7) Intentional heterogeneous grouping of students in class to promote collaboration, communication, accountability, academic conversation
- 8) Develop standards-based assessment tools such as "BAME" rubrics for use with assignments, assessments and projects. Provide instruction on using rubrics to self-evaluate work.
- 9) Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of concepts and skills.
(Exam retakes, opportunity to rework assignments, etc...)
- 10) Use data from District Math Assessments to inform instruction and monitor individual student achievement. (Formative Assessment)
- 11) Promote student self-reflection and goals-setting by developing student ownership of achievement data (District Math Assessment, exams, etc...).
- 12) Consistent collaboration among building math and science teachers
(Vertical and Horizontal Planning)
- 13) Increase parent contact with these students. Call them when their students do well, as well as when they begin to suffer.
- 14) Give feedback to the mentor teachers of these students so that they can discuss this with them. Issues can be brought up during mentor group and student lead conferences.
- 15) Make the achievement gap a point of discussion during our department meetings.
- 16) Make sure all resources are accessible to my students. Avoid course fees or required materials.

Technology

SOTA continues to build upon the use of technology in a variety of ways to enhance student learning. We are excited that the Tacoma School District is placing fiber optic lines in our Visual Arts building.

We also have a school website <tsota.org> and this is very used by instructors, parents, and students. Instructors place daily information on their swift websites so students and parents can find out what happened that day in class and to review upcoming assignments. Also, we keep a very up to date school calendar stating our various school activities.

Parent, Family and Community Involvement

We believe strongly in the power of parent and family involvement in our school and have worked hard over the years to develop a strong parent involvement component into our school program called SOTA Connections. The Connection Teams are SOTA parents that have monthly potlucks organized by zip code. These meetings allow parents to become more informed about the school and to become as involved with the school as they want to be. The Connection Teams combine their experience of building relationships with the art of communication to build a community that supports the vision of Tacoma School of the Arts.

The vision of the Connection Teams is to create an effective venue where community members engage and work together, in an effort to develop a better school for all students that supports and improves learning. SOTA Connections use creativity, innovation, and relationships to grow a community that fosters success for students at SOTA and beyond.

The mission of the Connection Teams is to grow a community where members engage in the school with the goal of assisting to create change while having a positive impact on learning as a whole. As connection leaders, we take responsibility for four core leadership strengths – Vision, Community, Relationships and Change – and focus on them throughout our building efforts to get the best outcomes for SOTA. These core strengths enable to successfully engage in the integrated course environment, including participating in classes. The results? A stronger community that is built on relationships, more commitment to SOTA’s unique curriculum, and a change in education that can only occur with the passion and commitment of everyone impacted.

Connection leaders seek to understand, and help others understand, the value and importance of participating in making a difference in how education is delivered in the South Sound. We are constantly engaging other community members to ensure that our goals remain the same. Throughout the year, individuals bring experience, passion and commitment to create a clear understanding of SOTA and the solutions we can be a part of together.

Connection leaders guide other community members and students to success by focusing on the outcomes and assist in delivering results. We use the skills and resources in the community to collaborate in accomplishing the goal of changing education. For example, by adding the right amount of participation working with staff and parents, connection leaders help the SOTA staff create opportunities for our students that have lasting impact in our community.

Connection leaders “light the fire” by creating the desire, energy and environment for other people to engage in the continued success of SOTA. We bring out the best in each other. We set clear expectations, build a sense of purpose and energy, and celebrate community and success. Change happens in an environment of participation and mutual respect, and connection teams set the example – encouraging input and setting objectives that keep people informed and focused on making a difference.

Coordination of Fiscal Services

SOTA's Partners is a non-profit corporation with the purpose of providing advocacy, resources and guidance to the Tacoma School of the Arts. The SOTA Partners evolved from the community group that envisioned and planned SOTA. They support projects and activities beyond what is provided by tax dollars through the school district. In the fall of 2002 they initiated the Adjunct Artist's Program that hires professional artists to teach classes and work with SOTA students. The Partners have also supported the teachers by funding collaborative planning time during the summer and by purchasing supplies and equipment. The Partners have expanded their role in supporting the school; with future goals of creating an endowment and developing capital for facilities.

SOTA's Adjunct Artist's Program exists due to the generous support of the SOTA Partners and visionary contributions of local community members, the Adjunct Artist's Program adds a vital and authentic dimension to SOTA's arts curriculum. This program brings professional artists to work with students in SOTA's classrooms. Recent courses taught by adjunct artists include graphic design, creative writing, jazz improvisation, and film studies. Adjunct artists bring students a wide range of in-depth arts studies. Students benefit from personal contact with dedicated professional artists in intensive small classes.