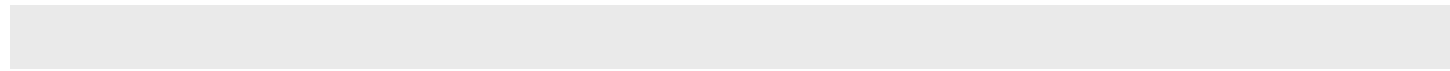


High Tech High

Status Report for High Tech High

Recommendations for improvement
July 1, 2006, **May 3, 2007**

Progress: School Year 2006-2007



Introduction

Purpose

It is my habit to give bi-yearly reports on the status of the school. The purpose is to give succinct findings of practices that work, those that are cause for concern, and recommendations for corrections and improvements to program. The desired outcome of course is common purpose and direction among all decision makers. As I was only recently hired July 1, I felt it appropriate to share my findings and goals with the Board at the beginning of my tenure, then build from that point.

The Charter school market is highly competitive. Potential student population in APS is flat with little projected growth. Currently, the majority of Charter Schools in the APS District are for high school students, with some schools adopting a 6th-12th grade structure. The middle school population is still underserved by established Charter Schools, allowing for a potential pool of students. Bottom line is HTH is going to have to operate as competitively as possible. This includes a focus on the unique aspects of the school, development of one-of-a-kind curriculum and features not possible in other Charters, support and nurture of faculty and staff creativity towards this end, a renewed devotion to customer service, as well as an aggressive marketing campaign.

Current Status

Liabilities:

- **Facilities:** the building facilities are frankly dismal and quite inappropriate. The fact that the school is obligated to another year of attendance there may be a liability from which we cannot survive. New locations, even part time, are a priority. Lack of facilities for PE is of great concern.
 - **August 2006**
 - **Painted**
 - **Installed web based camera security system**
 - **Re-carpeted**
 - **Repaired walls and facilities**
 - **Negotiated rooms on UNM campus**
 - **Negotiated transportation to UNM**
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- **January 2007**
 - **Negotiated new facilities**
- **Faculty:** the faculty is very young and inexperienced. The only “third year tier” teachers on site will be Polly Azar and myself. Classroom management appears to be a priority need. Students have been allowed a level of behavior by Administration that is not conducive to an effective learning environment. Teachers do not feel backed.
- **Hired Japanese**
- **Hired Chinese teacher**
- **Hired counselor**
- **Hired special ed coordinator**
- **Released two teachers and replaced them with level three teachers**
- **Released 1 secretary and replaced her with part time registrar**
- **Established Dean of students**
- **Enrollment:** Currently we are lacking 50% of the student population projected for the school. This translates into a \$350,000.00 shortfall. Reasons given by projected sophomore parents for not returning are lack of consistency in administration and faculty, high turn over rate of faculty and administration, lack of communication between the school and families, and lowered standards and performance by students in math and science. Additionally, the Charter population within the Albuquerque area has remained flat, resulting in a highly competitive market. Those schools that have been established over the past five years or so are enjoying waiting lists, whereas those with a more recent start up date are competing for students. The greatest recruitment technique by far is word of mouth. However it will require a couple of successful years before HTH enjoys the fruit of that labor. Hard recruitment of students (including print and television media) should optimally have begun in target populations in January. By this time of year parents have generally already chosen educational placement for their students.
- **Designed aggressive marketing plan**
- **Aligned student population behavioral standards with goals and mission of school**
- **Rewrote discipline policy**
- **Implemented daily e-mails to parents**
- **Two open houses**
- **Various attendance at community functions**

- **Existing curriculum:** the devotion to “Project Based Learning” as a method of basic instruction has resulted in many students actually losing ground academically in math and science. Although “Project Based” application of skill is an excellent tool for instruction, it is an ineffective way of teaching basic concepts. Additionally, integrated instruction is a superb delivery method, however not at the cost of basic math, science and English mastery. Clearly there has been some very heavy indoctrination by interested parties among the faculty, however the results are less than encouraging, and I believe the staff and especially the parents will quickly accept a more traditional pedagogy while at the same time, embracing project based applications.

- **Re-established rigorous academic curriculum**

- **Realigned projects with curriculum**

- **Lack of office personnel and school Counselor:**

To have the duties of Registrar, Office Manager, and Secretary fall to one person places the school in jeopardy. It is vital that phones be answered at all times. Only during weekend hours should voice mail be utilized. No job within the school should be dependent upon a single person. Additional secretarial personnel are needed.

Next Step plans, state testing requirements, and family counseling requirements make a school Counselor a wise investment. Although expensive, the payoff in testing results, facilitation of faculty duties and adherence to state requirements would make this position very cost effective.

- **Contracted counselor**
- **Hired part time registrar**
- **Re wrote secretarial duties**
- **Hired receptionist**

Assets:

Faculty: the faculty is young, enthusiastic and dedicated to their profession. Also listed as a liability, the resilience of the faculty is a real asset towards rebuilding and redefining program. The fact that few faculty members have been involved with the school since it's opening is actually of benefit, as the prevailing culture of the school is not well-defined and therefore open to change.

Association with UNM: this is of course a unique feature of HTH, not seen in any other Charter school within the city. Concurrent enrollment agreements are in place, which will reduce the cost of hiring “elective” instructors for students, in addition to providing an outstanding educational opportunity for students. Additionally, utilization

of UNM facilities and resources reinforces the ultimate goal of a University degree for HTH students.

Association with the City of Albuquerque: Another unique feature of HTH, formal partnership with the City allows not only access to a wealth of experience and resources, but also greater political influence in seeking State and Federal funds for the school. Although the current climate within the predominant educational community is somewhat hostile, City support for Charter schools has been positive. Current climate at the state level towards Charter schools is very supportive, not only philosophically, but also financially. Recent appointment of a Secretary for Charter schools is a very encouraging development.

Varied and cooperative relationships between new Administration and Community: Between the Board and the faculty of HTH, there is a wealth of community contact and involvement. Both the Dean and myself have well established and cooperative relationships with the community. Of specific note is the school board and administration of APS, as well as the Administration of Charter Schools within the PED. Hopefully, these relationships will continue and expand, allowing greater opportunity for our students and growth for our school.

Recommendations for 2006-2007 school year

1. Change in Name:

A name change is necessary by July 1st, due to our changing relationship with HTH. For expediency sake, the name has been changed to:

Albuquerque Institute for Math, Engineering and Science @ UNM or

[AIMES@UNM](#)

Please, dear Heaven, tell me that name is OK with you all! A surface polling of interested parties determined that UNM, the City and whatever random person we could find on the street, found the name to be attractive if not generally OK! The name not only has marketing possibilities, but it also reiterates the relationship between the City and UNM. The timing of the change may be a stroke of luck, as it comes at a time of reinvigoration and reinvention for the school.

Accomplished Fall 2006

2. Firm re-establishment of partnership with UNM and City of Albuquerque:

The competitive nature of the Charter climate requires an emphasis on unique characteristics of the program. Currently there are three characteristics unique to this school: a partnership with the University of New Mexico, a close supportive relationship with the city of Albuquerque, and a constant message that a four year degree is in the future of any student walking through the doors of AIMES@UNM. In addition to media coverage re-establishing this triangulation, it is suggested that the students have continual reminders of the goal of an AIMES education, which is ultimately a college degree. The popular statement that "not every student will go to college" will not be part of the culture of AIMES. Rather every student who walks through our doors does so with the intent of going to college. Ways of reinforcing this include guest lectures by University professors, shadowing of college students, attendance of classes on UNM campus, and involvement of AIMES students in college activities (i.e. events at Popejoy, Lobo games, etc.) in an effort to introduce and include our students into the culture of UNM.

City involvement has been ongoing, but can be more diversified as well as expand. The City of Albuquerque has a wealth of talent that can be shared in the form of lectures and projects. Of particular import is a community service component in the form of a project in which all students would take part. In addition, the City currently is undergoing a number of projects involving some fairly unique and involved engineering skills. Intimate exposure of students to these projects presents a unique opportunity that we as educators would be negligent to ignore. The timing of the Tricentennial and associated activities allows a historical perspective that is unique to our city. In short, our partnership with the City will allow a variety of opportunities for our students not readily available to traditional public school or other charter school students.

Accomplished Fall 2006: various press conferences and utilization of Mayor in Commercial

3. Change in location:

The facilities at HTH are appalling and quite frankly the biggest detractor from registration of children. The importance of "place" is a well-established factor in the behavior of students and faculty. Frankly, it is the rare parent who can overlook the conditions of the current facility. Two immediate possibilities are present: the first is to move as many of the classes as possible to the UNM campus. This would certainly be appealing to parents, and a unique draw for prospective students. Additionally it also serves to reinforce the purpose of the school, which is future enrollment in a four-year degree program. Although room at UNM is always a concern, in the early morning (8:00 am) classrooms and laboratories are available. Parents could drop their students off in the morning, students could attend their math, science or PE course there for the first three hours of the morning, then a bus could take the children back to the current campus or another location. Although classes would not need to be located in the same building, their close geographical location would be helpful. **Accomplished fall 2006**

The other possibility includes the former "social security building" within the Technical Park on University Blvd. Originally slated to be the campus for the school, it could be utilized part time (with part time at UNM) or full time, depending on the availability of classrooms and laboratories at UNM. Renovation has been taking place, and state monies have been appropriated for continued renovation, however it is vital that the school year open on any campus but the current one! **Accomplished January 2007**

4. Change in schedule

Examination of the teaching schedule revealed some areas of concern. The current block schedule is not effective for the delivery of math instruction. Algebra, Geometry, Calculus, English, Composition, Biology, Physics, and Chemistry are "building blocks" and upon learning these basics, students can then put them together in a meaningful and creative way. However, no student is going to "derive" these "blocks" through the trial and error, exploratory method. Instead what is seen is that each "project" a student does is scaled down to knowledge within their experience. If they know very little, then the project will be simplistic indeed. Also, I am distressed to see students after one year of IMP Math still struggling with the solution of a variable! Finally, the notion that we teach science in the order of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics because it follows alphabetical order is nothing more than an "urban" myth. Physics must be at the very least Algebra based, and optimally Calculus based. Chemistry is conceptually difficult, yet often uses Biological systems for illustration. This leaves Biology as the first science course because it is the science with which we are most intimately familiar. This standard order needs to be re-established. Additionally, students need to be taught Algebra, Geometry and ultimately Calculus. Students not up to grade level will need to have two hours of math per day, the first being the regular delivery of instruction, with follow-up remediation in the afternoon. I propose the following: **Accomplished Fall 2006**

- Math, Science and PE from 8 am until 11 am
- 11:15-11:45 Back to home base for lunch
- Afternoon of English, Social Studies and Japanese.

- 3-5 project work and advisement or concurrent enrollment, or College Prep (Homework or tutoring) or Remediation.

This necessitates that some teachers work into the early evening, with the appropriate extension of contracts.

4. Professional Development with instructors

These teachers are for the most part inexperienced and young. Pedagogy can be delivered without canceling any school time for students. What the teachers need most though, according to my very limited observation is:

- Collaboration time to come up with meaningful diversified projects that are standard to all students with standard parameters and requirements.
- Consistency
- Methods and training in classroom management. **Accomplished fall 2006 and spring 2007**

All of these can be delivered “in house” and do not require the cancellation of any instructional time. **Accomplished throughout the year**

5. Reinforce expectations of students.

We must at all times keep in mind the basic purpose of this school, which is that students will attend classes at UNM. This requires an expectation and requirement of student behavior and performance. My observation is that some students have not internalized this fact. Students must have continual reminders of the advanced educational goal of the school, including the demand that the behavioral standards of students be on par with those at UNM. Currently I am seeing students admitted into the HTH who do not have a prayer of attending UNM successfully, either due to cognitive differences or behavioral issues. In my opinion, setting students up for failure is very simply educational neglect. Parents needed to be made aware from the onset of the requirements and the potential outcomes for students who are not appropriate. Most clearly we will still welcome those students, however there must be a mutual understanding between the school and parents that the educational outcome may be less than desirable and in fact quite damaging. Most certainly that is a parental choice, however it must be an informed choice and parents must be made aware of this going into the program. Towards this end, I have made it a policy that I be present at all IEP's, and that IEP's be conducted prior to entrance to HTH. **Established fall 2006.**

6. Consider adding a sixth grade class to boost enrollment

It is reasonable to assume that at some point we will have to “grow our own” students. Immersing students in a college preparatory culture cannot happen soon enough. Additionally, the market for middle school students is very open. There are few Charter schools within the city for middle school students, yet parental dissatisfaction with Albuquerque Public Schools peaks during the middle school years.

Starting a middle school program with 8th grade and working back to 6th would not be as educationally sound as starting with a 6th grade class and working up each year to an 8th grade program. Parents are seeking alternatives for their students immediately after matriculating from their elementary program. Once entrenched into a program for two years, students are resistant to changing programs upon entering the 8th grade year. In fact, very often those students willing to change programs during the second or third year of mid-school are often ones struggling academically or socially. This is not true for 6th graders. Additionally, social factors would naturally allow 6th grade populations to operate simultaneously in place with existing 9th and 10th grade programs with fewer problems. Existing staff would easily be able to take on the additional students, as we are currently staffed for 180 students. **Established Spring 2007**

7. Aggressive marketing of program

The school needs to aggressively market its program in effort to compete with existing Charter schools. With the addition of Ms. Joan Griffin to the Board, along with her incredible expertise in marketing, I am confident that our marketing plan will be cutting edge and effective. Additionally, the school needs to be a presence on campuses and associations within the City. Active promotion of the school through speaking engagements, with a focus on promoting a presence for the school among communities not often visited by the educational establishment will go far in spreading the word about the school. Although we have gotten an extremely late start this school year, I am confident that an aggressive presence within the community will pay off. **Accomplished spring 2007**

8. Introduction of Japanese or Chinese into the curriculum:

I believe that Japanese or Chinese needs to be a requirement of all students attending AIMES@UNM. The reasons are threefold:

1. There is solid evidence that introduction and instruction of students in Japanese or Chinese increases the capacity of students to internalize and excel in Math and Science. Apparently the learning of an entirely new language, and it's accompanying change in the way of thinking, augments and supports learning in the areas of science and math.
2. There is every indication that Asian countries will be a major competitor for the United States in the future. Best our students become prepared now.
3. Once again the introduction of these languages allows our students a unique "leg up" on other students against which they compete. We would be unique in requiring Chinese or Japanese coursework.

Accomplished fall 2006

Recommendations for 2007-2008 school year

1. Addition of 6th and 11th grades:

Should the decision to add a 6th grade component not be made during the 2006-2007 school year, it should again be considered for the 2007-2008 school year. Additionally, an 11th grade class would be added during the same academic calendar.

Recruitment should begin during the first and second week of December, peak January through March, and steadily continue through the end of May. Parents are considering educational choices towards the end of the first semester. Middle schools begin orientation of fifth graders during this time period. Typical events are classroom visitations and jump start activities at the middle school campuses. High schools typically begin their registration in late January, with some high schools registering as late as March. No school within the APS system is on the same schedule, which necessitates proactive inquiry on the part of our staff.

Recruitment techniques should include, but not be limited to:

- Letters home to parents of qualified students. Letters should be sent to fifth graders and eighth graders of both public and parochial students. HTH personnel should back up these letters with visits to the classroom. **Accomplished Spring 2007**
- Informational addresses to neighborhood associations and service organizations such as Rotary Club, NAWBO (National Association for Women Business Owners), Chamber of Commerce, etc. **Established and ongoing**
- Informational articles in Organizational newsletters, such as Sandia Lab News, the Rotarian, Daily Lobo, NAWBO, etc. **Established and ongoing. Several articles published**

2. Expand application process:

The current application process demands little effort on the part of prospective students and parents, and gives little information to faculty and administration about the ability of students to successfully participate and complete the program. The application should set the tone for the academic and behavioral expectations of students. Towards this end, I suggest the following changes:

- **Expand the application process.** The current application process is too simplistic, demands little effort on the part of interested students and parents, does not reflect the rigor of the program, and provides little information about the ability of the student to successfully complete the program. My suggestion is to include a writing sample, transcripts, and recommendations from current teachers or administrators. **Accomplished fall 2006**
- **Interview of all interested students and parents upon application and entry into the lottery.** All interested parties will be interviewed by the administration early in the spring preceding the entry into the school. Rigor of

the program, expectations and requirements of students and parents, as well as reiteration of the college bound nature of the school should be presented, all in a positive and motivating manner. Additionally, the current standing of the student academically, including additional support that may be necessary for student academic success. **Established Spring 2007 and ongoing**

- Entering students at the sixth and ninth grade level who are currently below grade level in reading or math, must successfully complete a rigorous summer school program provided by AIMES@UNM prior to entry in the fall. **Established Spring 2007**
- Students failing classes will be reclassified (retained), and parents will meet with the educational team about roadblocks to success as well as alternative and more appropriate placement. **Established**