

**MID-CYCLE VISIT
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

FOR

TAMALPAIS HIGH SCHOOL

**700 Miller Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941**

Tamalpais Union High School District

April 21-24, 2015- (original visit)

March 19-20, 2018 - (current visit)

Visiting Committee Members

Brian Irvine, teacher (chair)

Fremont High School, Sunnyvale

Marissa Potts, teacher
Woodside High School

Betty Rice, teacher
Grant Union High School, Sacramento

Gregory Shelby, principal
Santa Clara High School

I. Introduction

Tamalpais High School, founded in 1908, is the oldest high school in the Tamalpais Union High School District. It is situated in Marin County, and draws from three unique communities: Mill Valley, Sausalito/Marin City, and Bolinas/Stinson Beach. The school's population has been growing over the past few years, listed at 1592 today, with anticipated growth to over 1700 by 2020. This increase in enrollment is not seen as a lasting issue, since this bubble should peak in 2020. The school's enrollment data shows about 70% white students, 10% Hispanic students, Asian students make up about 8%, and African American students at 4% of the population. About 6% are identified as low socio-economic status, and 6% as Special Education students.

Testing data (Smarter Balanced) indicates a moderate gain in both Math and English/Language Arts over the previous visit in 2015, although the school acknowledges English Language Learners are lagging behind the general population. The school has identified an achievement gap between white and Asian students, versus Latin American and African American students, that shows up in comparing GPAs, D and F reporting, and standardized tests.

Significant changes since the original visit include an almost totally new administrative team. The current principal arrived in August, 2016, followed by two new assistant principals, to join one AP who was here previously. A lack of continuity in addressing their strategic plans can be traced to this turnover and previous site administrative turnovers. There were also changes to the district administrative team, which means that plans suggested by the previous leadership (PLCs, strong intervention plans, and training to bring these ideas into the classroom) have not been executed yet.

Significant changes have also affected the teaching staff, creating a more positive climate at THS. About 40 new teachers have been hired since the last visit. The school has reported that this turnover has resulted in more communication between administration and staff. The increased enrollment has strained facilities at the school, leading to shared classrooms, crowded athletic facilities, and decreased teacher workspace.

New programs that have come to THS include AVID (this year), Algebra Foundations, Bridge the Gap (intervention strategies), COMPASS Program (collaboration with the College of Marin), Core, Peer Resource, and other support programs within the school. The Tam-Unity Committee was formed in 2017 after a racial incident on campus led the school to search for programs and events to build unity on the campus. Many of these programs are so new to the school that it is not yet able to evaluate their effectiveness at this time.

As previously mentioned, personnel changes in the leadership positions at the school have hampered their follow-up process. An achievement gap persists in math and advanced placement classes, with African American and Latino students still very underrepresented. The school reported minimal progress on some areas of the action plan. But other areas, including the AVID program this year, staff participation in professional development opportunities, and increased access to technology for the students have been positive.

This progress report was written by the school administration with support from school site council, staff, and teacher leaders. Teacher leaders were asked to review the document, and provide feedback and revisions before being shared and approved through the school site council.

II. Progress on Critical Areas for Follow-Up/ Schoolwide Action Plan

The previous visiting team left the school with five specific critical areas for follow-up.

A) Teachers should continue to develop differentiated instructional strategies to help all students succeed academically and facilitate equitable access as evidenced by formative assessment data.

AVID has been brought to THS this year with a group of 23 students. 45 students are enrolled in the Compass program in collaboration with the College of Marin. 20 students are enrolled in Success Network in collaboration with community based organizations. There have been staff-led professional development opportunities, and some differentiated tests have been created by teachers for students with various needs.

Use of data gathered through formative assessments is lacking throughout the subject areas. Although the school has time for collaboration built into the schedule every week, teachers have not yet made full use of it to plan lessons, create common assessments, and develop cross-curricular projects.

B) All staff need to develop ways to communicate constructively in the interest of meeting the needs of all students: teachers-teachers; teachers-administration; administration- teachers. An area of particular concern is communication regarding the collection, analysis, and use of data from assessments as it pertains to decisions regarding curriculum and instruction.

Collaboration among teachers is still lacking, although teachers do share some pacing calendars and some lessons. There is time built into the schedule every week for teacher collaboration, but as of now, few are using it in a meaningful way, with little evidence of course-specific and assignment-specific data being analyzed. It is not clear that there are expected outcomes or reporting on collaboration at this point. Students and parents that were interviewed mentioned an inconsistency between sections of the same course, with some sections/teachers requiring significantly more rigor than others. In conversation with teacher leaders, it was reported to the visiting team that shared assessments are not the norm, but do occur in a few classes. Having increased alignment of sections of the same course, shared assessments, and shared discussion of data from these assessments (both formative and summative) would help THS to address this critical area of follow-up.

One area of special need that was reported by both parents and students was increased consistency and student-centered approaches in the math department, and this was backed up by reports that indicate lower math scores on standardized tests than other areas in the school. Based on these reports, the visiting team visited the math department and noted that, while there were examples of student-centered teaching in some classes, the discrepancies between teaching approaches and course content appeared significant. The recommendation for increased collaboration mentioned above appears even more urgent in the math department.

C) District and site administration need to address site technology issues that have hindered 21st century real world applications in all curricular areas.

The Tam High Foundation has funded chromebook carts across departments. In addition, there has been an increase in wi-fi coverage throughout the campus, and new equipment was purchased to assist in the Journalism, photography, marine biology, and drama classes. Several departments reported that, with these additions, their departments have something close to one-on-one device access. Drop-in visits by the visiting team showed usage of device in less than 20% of the classrooms, and that usage was limited to word processing or computer science classrooms. While more steps are needed in terms of professional development and wifi infrastructure, significant improvements are noted.

D) While site leadership communicates well with parents and students, site administration needs to develop systematic and effective communication methods to ensure sharing of ideas and feedback options with the teaching staff.

The school has reported some improvement with increased communication among the stakeholders, building more trust between administration and teachers, and the introduction of courageous conversations agreements and protocols. Daily e-mails from the administrative assistant announce important information and event calendars for the staff. The principal's introduction of the "Farr-cyde" (a play on his last name), a weekly memo highlighting instruction, staff accomplishments, and important announcements including calendar of upcoming events. A quarterly newsletter is also sent home to parents. Parents reported a high level of satisfaction with the new forms of communication coming from administration. Parents also reported improved communication from teachers regarding grades via the Home Access system, but note that other forms of teacher communication are less consistent. Parents expressed a desire for more streamlined communication systems from teachers.

E) In preparing to address the long term action items of the Visiting Committee report, the site administration should develop a broad based leadership team, which represents all stakeholders.

Teacher-leaders have been identified and meet with administrators weekly during a shared prep period, which improves the process of shared decision making among the stakeholders. These teacher leaders (TLs) are representatives from each department, and serve more as instructional leaders than the old department chairs model. They are given a release period and a stipend, with the expectation that they will work with teachers within their respective departments. The current administration has worked to make sure that the teacher leaders are educators who are more collaborative-minded and forward-thinking than previous department leaders. If kept intact, this structure appears to be appropriate for moving departmental collaboration forward.

Site administrators also work with multiple stakeholder groups, including the School Site Council, PTSA, and student government in order to include parent and student voices in decision making processes. Students report that they feel that student voices matter on campus, and evidence of this was shown during recent peaceful demonstrations around nation-wide gun violence.

III. Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

- This is the second year for this principal and his administrative team. He and the team enjoy the support of the parents and students at the school, and has responded honestly and transparently to difficult situations on campus during his tenure.
- THS has reached out to its feeder schools, to identify and bring support to students earlier. Examples include journalism activities, and a math teacher who teaches one period at a middle school, to reach students there in preparing them for the rigors of the high school math classes.
- The leadership team that has been formed to direct the instructional changes the school has identified.
- Bringing the wellness center to the THS campus has been a great addition this year to care for the students as they experience the stresses common to a high school campus.
- The addition of AVID to the campus has brought a needed program benefitting the students in the middle, who have been largely ignored. The plans are to see it grow to three sections next year.

Recommendations:

- THS needs to focus more on true collaboration among teachers. The school's schedule has time built in for this collaboration to exist. There needs to be more action on real collaboration in developing lessons and assessments in common, as well as analysis of course-specific and assignment-specific data in order to find ways to meet the needs of all THS students.
- Differentiation and an achievement gap, both racially and socio-economically, still need to be addressed. Barriers to enrollment in some AP and Honor's courses are slowly being dropped, but more students of color can be encouraged in the lower levels to plan for taking these more rigorous classes. Curricular content can be improved to be accessible to students of diverse learning needs via the collaboration system addressed in the previous recommendation.
- Sustain current leadership structures, efforts in improvement technology use, and new communication systems.