

Rhode Island Department of Education
Office for Diverse Learners

School Support System Report and Support Plan for the
Highlander Charter School
January 29-30, 2008

SCHOOL SUPPORT SYSTEM

A Collaborative System of Focused Monitoring

Introduction

The purpose of the School Support System (SSS) is to provide a means of accountability for delivery of programs and services for students with exceptionalities. The School Support System model is designed to promote the involvement of the whole school district, general educators as well as special educators and parents. It is designed to learn if the district meets the regulations and what effects programs and services have on student outcomes. Finally, the SSS develops a school support plan for training and technical assistance.

To accomplish these goals the SSS includes these components:

- **The Orientation Meeting** The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) staff meets with the Local Education Agency (LEA) to plan the site review and identify issues or initiatives that may influence programs or service delivery.
- **Data Analysis Meeting** The RIDE staff meets to review LEA demographic information on selected reports including: the LEA annual plan, census information, and information collected through record review, staff questionnaires and parent interviews. To ensure that the child is at the center of the study, all analyses begin with the child. Thus, a sample of approximately 30 students with exceptionalities is selected; the records of these students are reviewed; their parents, teachers and related service providers are interviewed, and their classrooms are observed. The result is an in-depth, unified examination of the actual provision of programs and services for students with exceptionalities. The RIDE staff compiles a preliminary summary of their analyses of this data.
- **Presentation by the LEA and School Site Review** The on-site review begins with a presentation of programs by teachers and staff. The presentation provides the review team with general and specific information on delivery of programs and services to students. Following this presentation, on-site reviews to all schools are made. The team members interview school administrators and teaching staff. Parents and central office staff are also interviewed. The team gathers sufficient information and works with the LEA personnel to generate a report, covering the following:
 - The district's compliance with the state and federal regulations, relative to the education of students with exceptionalities.
 - The quality and effectiveness of programs and services provided by the district.
 - The need for professional development and technical assistance that will enable the LEA to improve programs and services.
- **The Support Plan/Corrective Action** The RIDE team, LEA central office and building administrators meet to review the data and complete a report of results. The group designs a professional development/technical assistance support plan with timelines for implementation. This plan enables the school and district to correct areas of non-compliance and to strengthen promising programs and correct areas of weakness in order to improve services and programs for all students.
- **The SSS Report** The report summarizes the findings from the various data sources. The format of the report uses four divisions: Indicators, Findings, Documentation, and Support Plan. Indicators describe either performance or compliance. Findings can include a variety of some six categories, from School Improvement to Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment. The documentation section of the report distinguishes the source of the finding. The support plan reflects the response to the described findings. The support plan describes the corrective action required by the district as well as resources and Timelines to improve programs and services.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. School Improvement /Family Engagement
2. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
3. Evaluation/ Individual Education Plan (IEP)
4. Transition

Highlander Charter School
School Support System Review
January 29-30, 2008

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1. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT / FAMILY ENGAGEMENT					
Indicator		Findings	Documentation	Support Plan	Follow-up Findings
Performance	1	<p>School Improvement Plan/Team</p> <p>The CVS Highlander Charter School was established in the fall of 2000, first serving students as a Kindergarten through fifth grade and to date with the expansion of their grade level to the eighth grade. The Highlander student population is drawn largely from the greater Providence area 75% while the remaining 25% comes from the surrounding cities and towns. The RI based CVS Highlander Charter School is modeled after the Highlander Folk School, founded in 1923 and today called the Highlander Research & Education Center of Knoxville Tennessee. The Centers focus has been to assist community members in seeking solutions to social problems and as a training site for labor and civil rights organizations in an experiential based hands-on model. The CVS Highlander Charter School has committed their educational focus to address social justice in developmentally appropriate ways, providing students with opportunities to explore their personal interest and passions and to empowering both students and parents to work together in all aspects of problem solving.</p> <p>A Board of Trustees oversees all facets of the CVS Highlander Charter School. The Board consists of 15 members, two of which are parents and operates as a school board/school committee.</p> <p>A School Improvement Team at Highlander is comprised of parent representatives from each classroom, faculty, a school administrator, a student and an alumnus, a representative of the High-Five (Parent Teacher Association) and a board of trustees' representatives. The team is currently meeting monthly addressing the three year progress outcomes of the five year overall school improvement plan.</p>	<p>Presentation Document</p> <p>Faculty Interviews</p>		

		<p>In April of 2005, the Highlander Charter School engaged in a comprehensive needs assessment as a foundation for developing their School Improvement Plan. The assessment initiative addressed areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, data based accountability and evaluation, professional development, culture and climate, leadership and governance, extended learning activities, parental and community involvement and external resources. A leadership team comprised of the Head of School Assistant Head of Schools, the Dean of Students and the Director of After School Programs, along with external partners participated in the process identified the following target areas of focus and action;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards-based Curriculum • Standards-based Instruction • Standards-based Assessment • Data-Based Accountability and Evaluation • Structural Reform Strategies • Leadership and Governance • Professional Development • Cultural and Climate • External Support and Resources • Parental and Community Involvement • Extended Learning Activities <p style="text-align: center;">MISSION</p> <p>All children will develop, through a breadth of rigorous learning experiences, a commitment to excellence in all they do, a passion for lifelong learning, and the skills they need to be active, responsible, and productive community members.</p>			
Performance	2	<p>Professional Development</p> <p>All professional development at Highlander Charter School is aligned to the school improvement plan. Faculty have participated in the following professional development opportunities:</p> <p>Readers and Writer's Workshop</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		

		Curriculum Mapping, Analyzing assessment data, linking data to practice, School s Attuned, Responsive Classroom Orton-Gillingham Multi-Sensory Reading Project Read, Touch Math SLIPS			
Performance	3	CVS Highlander has a pithier of community relationships and along with Partnerships with Higher Education. Bradford-Dunn Institute for Learning Differences (Highlander serves as a public school laboratory for the Dunn’s Institute) Providence City Arts City Year and AmeriCorps The Met High School RI Foundation Casey Family Services Foster Grandparents Delta Consultants Boys and Girls Club Washington Park Community Center Elmwood Community Center Southside Community Center Land Trust RI Black Heritage Society Trinity Repertoire Company RI College Johnson and Wales University Brown University RI School of Design Textron CVS Hasbro Center for Teaching Excellence RI Tutorial Educational Services	Presentation Document Faculty Interviews		
Performance	4	Instructional Strategies / Data based practices instructional	Presentation		

	<p>initiatives</p> <p>Throughout the school there was evidence of student centered, teacher facilitated instruction, modeling (by both teacher and student) cooperative learning, student problem solving, and journal writing and posted student work.</p> <p>Highlander facilitates a number of instructional strategies including but not limited to the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Based Learning • Responsive Classroom • Orton-Gillingham • Computer Technology • TERC/Investigations curriculum • Addison Wesley for math • Kits for science • Readers and Writers Workshop • LEXIA Reading • My Reader Coach • Fluncy Reader Trainer <p>Highlander uses the Responsive Classroom as their approach to teaching and learning which fosters safe, challenging, and joyful elementary and middle level classrooms and schools. It consists of practical strategies for bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day.</p> <p>Instructional Beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum. • How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand. • The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. • To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self control. • Knowing the children we teach-individually, culturally, and developmentally is as important as knowing the content we teach. • Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's 	<p>Document Faculty Interviews Classroom Observations</p>		
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	<p>education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the adults at school work together is as important as individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community. <p>Instructional Strategies Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning Meetings • Rules and Logical Consequences • Guided Discovery • Academic Choice • Classroom Organization • Working with Families <p>Each student has a learning team comprised of their parents, teachers and support staff. Along with the student the team meets throughout the year to develop an individual learning plan which reflects the student's goals academically, socially and organizationally. The plan is a "compass" for helping a student work on areas that are specific to his/her learning addressing two to four goals detailing an action for achieving those goals. The individual learning plan is reviewed throughout the year (October, January (optional), and April) and revised as appropriate</p> <p>All Highlander students exhibit their work through written, visual and or oral expression as exhibitions. For students K through the fourth grade, exhibitions are sometimes performed through small groups where as the upper level students exhibitions will be more individualized and interest based involving field trips, surveys, research and interviews. Teachers guide students through their exhibits. All exhibits are evaluated and assessed.</p> <p><i>(Parents are required to participate in both individual learning plans and exhibitions.)</i></p> <p>Each student has a portfolio of work collected throughout the year to be use in developing individual learning plans as well as documenting progress through the narrative assessments.</p> <p>Summer programming at Highlander Charter School offers students entering K up to the fifth grade three week literacy</p>			
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		<p>based program with an academic focus in the morning and an arts program in the afternoon. Students are recommended to this summer program free of charge to families to support students identified through student assessment analysis (New England Common Assessment Program) and classroom assessments). Students with IEP's attend as appropriate.</p> <p>Students entering the 6th to the 9th grade are additionally provided an opportunity to participate in a summer program which provides individual and or small group tutorials in math and or literacy. Students are recommended to the program based on New England Common Assessment Program data and classroom assessments.</p>			
Performance	5	<p>Use of student assessment and performance data to inform instruction</p> <p>The Highlander faculty is currently reviewing data to inform school wide instructional issues and needs. Goals have been established with objectives for student learning. Analyzing student data to inform instruction at the classroom level is emerging.</p> <p>Assessments utilized at Highlander Charter School include but are not limited to the following assessments. The New England Common Assessment Program, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening, Dynamic Indicator of Basic Literacy Skills, the Developmental Reading Assessment. Reading, Stanford Diagnostic Math and Reading Testing, Addison Wellesley Pre and Post Testing measuring math progress and informal teacher generated authentic assessment to measure the mastering of learning goals.</p> <p>PLP's are written by general educators with support from the resource teachers. Students may receive their PLP instruction through a general educator and/or a special educator.</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		
Performance	6	<p>The Teacher Support Team (TST) meets monthly addressing instructional interventions and students needs academically, socially and behaviorally. The Team is comprised of the school</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		

		<p>administrator, school social worker and psychologists and teachers. The use of Response to Intervention (Rtl) related strategies are emerging through the TST process.</p> <p>Professional development for Rtl was provided in August with additional training being facilitated through grade level meetings currently.</p> <p>Common planning time varies in schedule design for educators at Highlander Charter School. Some faculty acknowledge having common planning time with co-grade level teachers, while other noted that they do not have scheduled common planning time during the school day. Some common planning occurs during the weekly faculty meeting time frame. Educators will meet voluntarily beyond school hours to plan for classroom and student activities. Currently scheduled planning time is not available for special educators to meet with general education peers.</p> <p>Faculty meetings are held weekly and are specifically focused to address overall faculty issues, professional development, TST, curriculum planning and or school improvement activities.</p> <p>Once a month professional development is addressed through a ½ day session addressing training identified through the school improvement plan and or as issue arise that are student/school/parent identified.</p> <p>Highlander Charter School has just initiated a New Teacher Mentor program. The initiative is just emerging with a more formal process is being planned for.</p>			
Performance	7	<p>Family Engagement</p> <p>All Highlander Charter School parents commit to being actively involved in their child's education upon acceptance into school. Parents participate in quarterly student-teacher learning planning meetings/exhibitions; participate as board/school improvement team members along with typical parent activities such as open houses, committee work, chaperoning and classroom opportunities, volunteerism, the Hi-Five Parent Organization and</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		

	<p>the Special Education Advisory Committee. Parents additionally participate in Potluck dinners, Family Picnics, the Talent Show, Math and Reading Week, Portfolio Nigh and Stepping Stones.</p> <p>A home visit is hosted by the student in his/her home, and includes the student, the teacher and parents/guardians to discuss the individual learning plans. Individual student learning plans outline the academic, social and organizational goals for each student supporting personalization and differentiated learning that occurs at Highlander.</p>			
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2. FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (FAPE/LRE)					
Indicator		Findings	Documentation	Support Plan	Follow-up Findings
Performance	1	<p>Program Continuum</p> <p>At Highlander Charter School there are 249 (249 chosen by mandatory lottery) students, with 42 of those students' receiving special education services and supports.</p> <p>All special educational services and supports are provided through an inclusion model, with pull out resource support and services for a more individualized, skill based instructional opportunity determined by student need along with their IEP. The majority of resource services and supports are provided in class including occupational therapy (OT) and speech and language therapy (SLP).</p> <p>OT and SLP work in partnership/co-treatment to provide students with topical groups addressing attention and organizational skills, reading non verbal cues, sensory processing and language engagement along with teacher/parent consultation. Students are provided per their IEP appropriate services and supports as in-class, small group and or individual therapy as directed by their IEP's.</p> <p>A Recovery Room initiative has been established at Highlander Charter School to support students who may be experiencing social, emotional and or behavioral difficulties in the classroom and or whole school environment. This initiative has clear entrance and exit criteria for students participating in the setting.</p>	<p>Presentation</p> <p>Document</p> <p>Faculty Interviews</p> <p>Classroom</p> <p>Observations</p>		

		<p>Each class throughout the school has a setting for students to regain social, emotional and or behavioral composure, and to then re-enter the classroom activities.</p> <p>Buddy Teachers are identified by each teacher school wide. A buddy teacher provides support to their identify buddy teacher when a student needs to leave the classroom to their identified teacher buddy. This relationship provides for consistency in value and process for addressing students having difficulty in their assigned classroom. If students are unable to focus they are then directed to the Recovery Room.</p> <p>Students use the Recovery Room in a variety of ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student is unable to re-focus at the classroom level (recovery pass) • A student is assigned to the Recovery Room • And or a student self determines the need to use the Recovery Room (choice pass) <p>The Recovery Room is structured with clear directions, policies and protocols for students to self reflect, identify alternative problem solving strategies and to re-focus leading to re-entering either the classroom and or whole school community.</p>			
Performance	2	<p>School removals / disciplinary policies</p> <p>Highlander Charter School has clear policies addressing disciplinary infractions along with student outcomes.</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		
Performance	3	<p>Social emotional resources/positive behavioral interventions and supports</p> <p>At Highlander the school wide belief of high standards for conduct supporting students to meet high academic expectations was noted throughout the review. The school follows the principals of the Responsive classroom and Schools Attuned. Two movements which provide social and emotional venue to addressing the needs of the whole child. Each</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews School wide Observation</p>		

		<p>classroom opens its day with a short morning meeting to set the tone and the agenda for the day. Weekly class meetings serve as a venue for resolving conflicts and handling class issues. Teachers guide students in the proper use and storage of all classroom materials. Teachers and students work together each fall to develop full school and classroom rules as well as logical consequences. Town meetings are facilitated weekly to provide students with typical announcements (birthdays, pats on the back, along with presentations of student work and or performances</p> <p>Currently Highlander Charter School is engaged in a variety of activities addressing social emotional learning school-wide. Noted below are a few examples;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Skills Groups • All teachers are teaching a unit on tolerance and social justice school wide • Signature trips • Reading Buddies • Peer counseling • Chest Buddies • Peer Mediation Program 			
Performance	4	<p>Facilities Throughout the building evacuation plans were posted and individual planning for students with mobility issues are addressed.</p> <p>City Arts for Youth is a joint tenant with Highlander Charter School providing classrooms, offices, and learning spaces for Highlander and over 6,000 square feet of dedicated arts education space for City Arts.</p>	<p>Presentation Document Faculty Interviews</p>		

3. EVALUATION/ INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)					
Indicator		Findings	Documentation	Support Plan	Follow-up Findings
Performance	1	Three student records were reviewed representing the federal disability categories, age, grade and sex across the K through		Assurances will be provided to the RI Department of Education, Office of	See follow up for items in the box below (item

		the 8 th grade level program at Highlander Charter School. Themes noted through the record review process are noted in the box below (item #2) within this section of the report.		Special Needs that compliance issues are addressed and rectified. <i>This Support Plan is applicable for all compliance findings in this section.</i> Timeline: Immediately. Progress check: October 2008	#2). All follow up has been verified by RIDE personnel.
Compliance	2	<p>Record Review</p> <p>Evident throughout Highlander Charter School special education student record review was limited evidence of a structured process to procure documentation regarding special education related planning and service delivery.</p> <p>The special education record reviews did not contain information regarding student placement /intake/ time frame and or related information and or data (Evaluation Team Meeting eligibility for special education services and supports documentation).</p> <p>Case management responsibilities were not clearly defined and often unclear leading to significant gaps in record management and service delivery. The following are themes identified through the record review process and faculty interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEP Progress Reporting- though Highlander facilitates a progress narrative it is unclear how this narrative is aligned with the students IEP goals and objectives. • ESY – process and eligibility determination unclear • Consent – overall management of documentation unclear • Required documentation not consistently noted on IEP's. • Vocational Assessments and alignment to student IEP's 	Record Reviews Faculty Interviews Record Review JK 1,2,3	<p>The Highlander Charter School Administration in conjunction with the appropriate staff and faculty will identify and create policies, protocols and related special education documents as a comprehensive special education central record.</p> <p>Timeline: Immediate and on Going Progress Check October 2008</p> <p>The Highlander Charter School Administration will provide technical assistance to special educators and/or related service providers regarding case management expectations and responsibilities.</p> <p>Timeline: Immediately and ongoing Progress check: October 2008</p>	<p>Records have been re-organized and each file has the appropriate documentation delineated in the review findings.</p> <p>Trainings occurred in September 2008 with ongoing coaching during the school year for case managers. Case manager duties were divided among special education staff. Training occurred in August 2009 prior to start of school for all special education personnel.</p>
Performance	3	<p>Evaluation procedures and protocols-</p> <p>Evaluations are facilitated at Highlander Charter School for both new and three year re-evaluations by a school psychologist and</p>	Presentation Document Faculty Interviews Record Review		

		the resource teachers. Any additional evaluations are contracted out.			
Performance	4	Physical Education (PE) is provided at the Elmwood Community Center by a certified PE teacher. Health is provided by the school nurse teacher.	Presentation Document Faculty Interviews		

4. TRANSITION					
Indicator		Findings	Documentation	Support Plan	Follow-up Findings
Performance	1	<p>Vocational Assessments / procedures, linkages to transition planning / connectivity to the IEP</p> <p>There are a variety of transition activities facilitated at Highlander Charter School for students entering the school at all levels. Some of those activities include the following:</p> <p>Kindergarten students and their families meet in summer to plan for the most appropriate placement and service delivery. For students entering with an Individual Family Service Plan a family meeting is planned for to develop an IEP.</p> <p>At the 7th grade level students start to engage in a variety of activities to address career exploration and high school planning. All 7th grade students are given the COP's interest inventory to be utilized for project development the following 8th grade year. Based on the results of the inventory 8th grade students will create an exhibit addressing what they have learned through their research. However for students who are 14 years of age and are eligible for special education services the findings of this inventory is not embedded in their IEP.</p> <p>For students transitioning to the high school, Highlander Charter School meets with Families to discuss placement options at prospective high schools in the spring and fall of the entering year</p> <p>Students at Highlander Charter School engage in Junior Achievement activities grades K-8.</p>	Presentation Document Faculty Interviews	<p>The Highlander Charter School Administration will provide policy guidance along with technical assistance to special educators to align vocational assessment outcomes with IEP's for appropriate students.</p> <p>Timeline: Immediately and ongoing Progress check: January 2009</p>	<p>All special educators attended the training in September 2008 on the new IEP requirements for students and training will occur in September 2009 to ensure that vocational alignment is indicated and embedded in IEP's of all 8th grade students.</p>
Compliance					

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