
Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Literacy Root-Cause Analysis Report

Project Team

Melodie Barron, Independent consultant
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April 4, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

Adams 12 Five Star Schools (Adams 12) is located north of Denver and is comprised by all or parts of the following communities: Broomfield, Federal Heights, Northglenn, Thornton, and Westminster. Based on the October 1, 2013 count, Adams 12 serves 42,230 students with the following demographics: 5.3% Asian, 2.2% Black, 35.3% Hispanic, 0.8% Native American, 1.9% Two or More Ethnicities, and 54.4% White. The number of English Language Learners (ELLs) has increased over the past few years and now stands at approximately 13.7%. The number of students receiving free/reduced lunch has increased as well over the last few years and now stands at 38.0%, roughly a 2.7% increase from 2012-13. In general, schools in the southern portion of the district are comprised of greater percentages of ELLs and students receiving free/reduced lunch, in some cases over 90% in each category, and schools in the northern portion of the district are comprised of fewer at-risk students. (Adams 12, 2013)

The Adams 12 strategic plan, Polaris, states the district's vision and mission statements as follows:

- **Vision** - Adams 12 Five Star Schools exists so the students it serves are well-prepared for the next stage of their lives and obtain the skills, knowledge and expertise to thrive in our world.
- **Mission** - To engage and inspire all students to innovate, achieve and succeed in a safe environment by ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, every day. (Polaris, 2013)

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These vision and mission statements are undergirded firmly and steadfastly in practice by the following commitments, outcomes and strategies.

- Commitments:
 - **Student Learning**
 - **Professional Practice**
 - **Collective Responsibility**
- Outcomes:
 - **Increase** the Graduation Rate
 - **Increase** Median Growth Percentiles to the 50th percentile or above
 - **Meet or exceed** the state of Colorado's proficiency data in reading, writing, math, and science
- Strategies:
 - **Create:** multiple pathways for student learning
 - **Strike:** the 'just-right' balance between empowerment and accountability
 - **Build:** strong community relationships.

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As a result of this committed, outcome-driven, and strategic approach by leadership at all levels in the organization, Adams 12 has seen important achievement gains in three priority outcome areas:

- **The four year graduation rate has increased (Figure 1)**

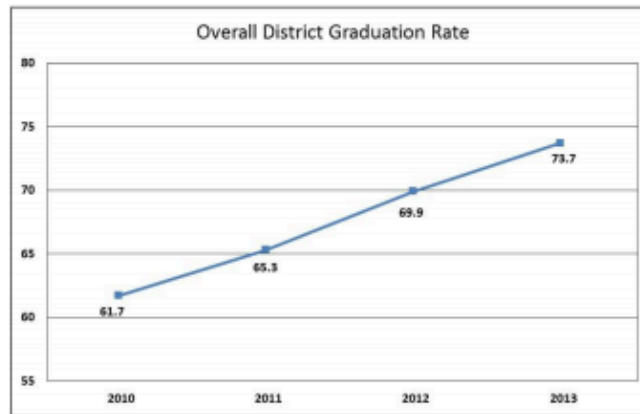


Figure 1: Four year graduation rates 2010 – 2013

- **The graduation rate gap between student populations has narrowed (Figure 2)**

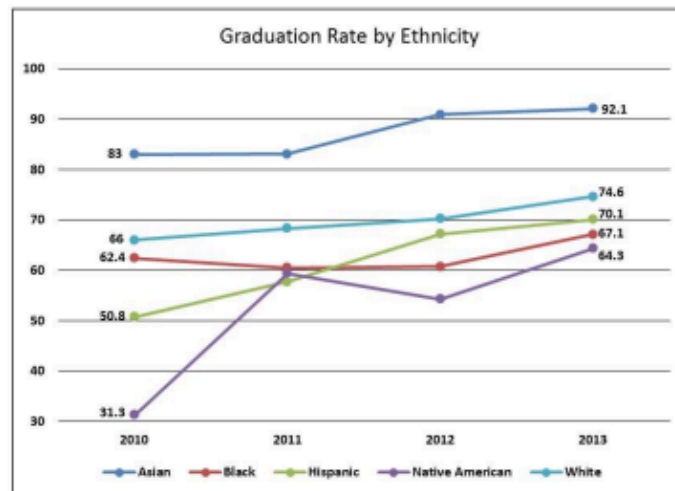


Figure 2: Four year graduation rate gaps by student population

- **ACT scores have improved.**

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At the same time, district data indicates areas of student achievement worthy of closer examination. One area, to be examined in this report, reflects student progress in literacy. Here the data indicates the following trends for student achievement in Adams 12:

- The number of students achieving proficient and advanced on the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) in reading and writing across the district at all grade levels has been relatively flat or down slightly from 2009 to 2013.
- Both reading and writing proficient and advanced achievement scores lag behind the state average growth by 6 and 7 percent respectively.
- Proficient and advanced achievement on the TCAP tests in math and science also lags behind the state average growth for these subjects.
- Overall, the % of Adams 12 students proficient or advanced are flat or down slightly from 2009 to 2013 at all school levels.
- Middle school students underperform their demographic peers in the state, across all groups.

Figures 3 and 4 on the next page illuminate these data statements.

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Figure 3: Student achievement on TCAP

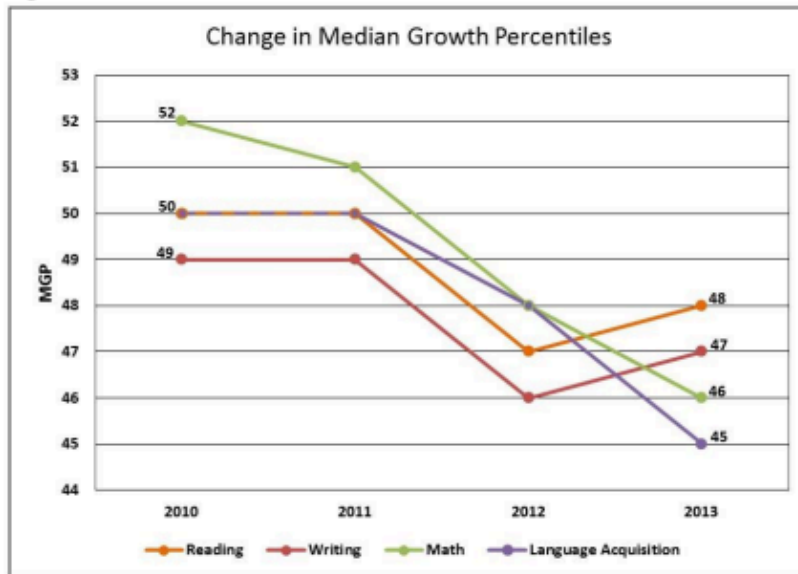


Figure 4: Adams 12 achievement compared to overall state achievement

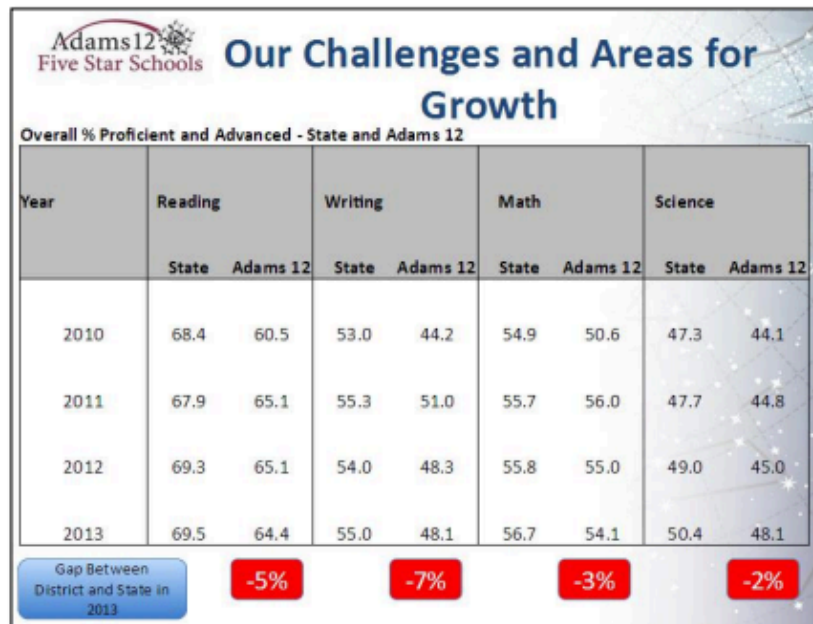


Figure 3: Student achievement on TCAP

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In an effort to better understand the implications of these data findings, and, in order to improve literacy performance across the district at all levels, district leadership engaged three outside consultants (Melodie Barron, an independent consultant; and Cathy Feldman and Lee Kappes, Reach Associates) to conduct a multi-pronged root-cause analysis of literacy achievement in Adams 12. This project was bounded by three guiding questions:

1. What root causes are contributing to student literacy achievement in Adams 12?
2. What actions will be needed to meet the desired outcomes for literacy achievement?
3. How can Adams 12 ensure that the district's literacy focus is aligned to the rigor in the new Colorado Academic Standards (CAS), which are aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

Note: For the purposes of this report, we will use the CAS when referring to standards for student performance. It is further noted that the shifts in the CAS are directly aligned with the shifts in the CCSS and part of the state and national conversation about raising the bar for student achievement in our communities and across our country.

The root-cause analysis process was conducted during January and February 2014 and included the following components:

- Deep dive analysis of Adams 12 literacy data
- Review of related district documents and reports
- Learning Services staff interviews and analysis of the data collected
- Focus groups with teachers and administrators and analysis of the data collected
- Classroom visits at elementary, middle and high schools and analysis of the data collected
- School and district level resource inventories and analysis of the data collected.

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The overarching purpose of this inquiry process was to positively effect changes in student literacy performance through a deeper understanding of existing literacy practices and programs in Adams 12 classrooms. Specifically, the purpose of The Adams 12 Literacy Report is threefold:

- Present the summarized findings from the root-cause analysis process
- Draw conclusions based on the findings presented
- Make strategy and action recommendations based on the findings and conclusions to support student success and increased literacy achievement in Adams 12.

A VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Preparation and planning to ready the district for the literacy program and practices improvement process has already begun. Learning Services has identified four pillars of practice to support student achievement in a standards-based education approach for all students in every Adams 12 classroom everyday:

- Instructional practice
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Standards-based grading.

Within this framework, professional development opportunities are focused on one or more of the four pillars and are planfully intended to directly impact teacher effectiveness. Meeting the needs of special populations and using instructional technology to advance learning are prioritized in this framework. Figure 5 presents a visual representation of this vision for teaching and learning in Adams 12.

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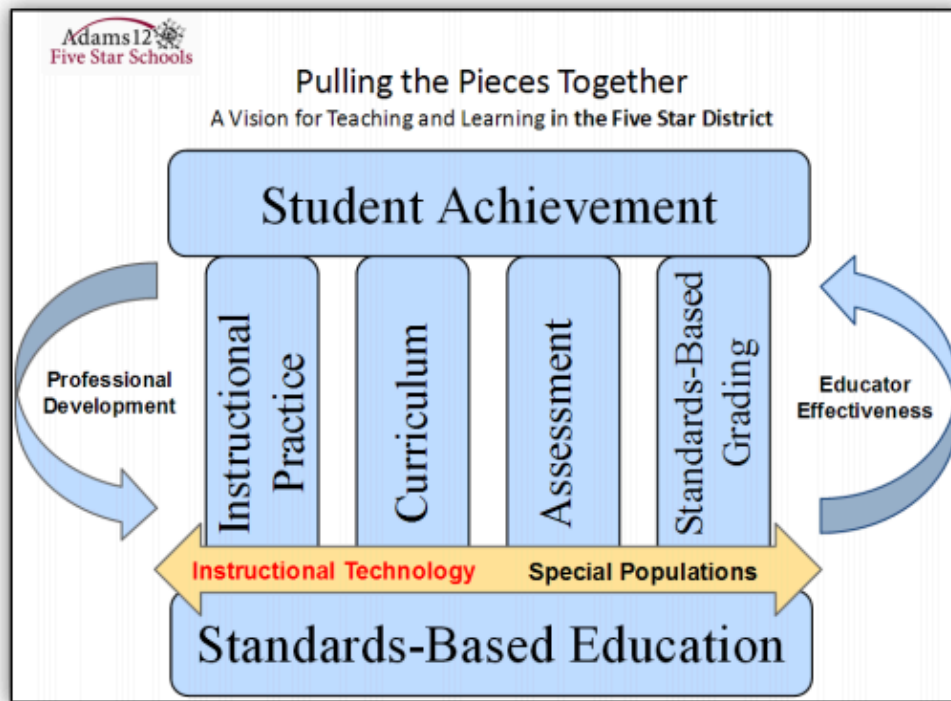
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Figure 5: A vision for teaching and learning in Adams 12



BACKGROUND

A review of district documents created and shared by members of the Learning Services team responsible for guiding and supporting literacy instruction was completed. The analysis revealed a history of principled thinking based on current research and best practices and a progression of actions taken at the elementary, middle and high school levels from 1999 to 2011. Most of this work was led by individuals from central office departments and rolled out to schools in varied ways.

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