

## Ensuring College and Career Readiness for All Students by Strengthening Instruction

### SCHOOL PROFILE:

**La Quinta High School, La Quinta, CA**

**Metro Status:** Suburban

**Grades:** 9–12

**Total Enrollment:** 2,985

**Hispanic:** 56%

**Caucasian:** 36%

**African American:** 3%

**Asian:** 3%

**Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program:** 44%

**Special Education Services:** 7%

**English Language Learners:** 6%

### OVERARCHING GOALS

In 2005, LQHS began working with the International Center for Leadership in Education (a partner in Scholastic Achievement Partners) and the Successful Practices Network (a non-profit affiliate of the International Center) as part of a five-year high school initiative developed in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The purpose of the initiative was to identify, analyze, enrich, and disseminate the nation's most successful school-wide practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students. LQHS was selected by the California Department of Education to participate in the Gates project.

The principal, Donna Salazar, recognized the need to increase the engagement levels of students, in order to improve proficiency levels across the school's substantial career-technical education (CTE) program, large International Baccalaureate

### THE CHALLENGE

When La Quinta High School (LQHS) was selected to take part in a study sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2005, the school set a goal to ensure that all students were receiving the support they needed to be prepared for college and the workplace. In 2008, over half (67.1%) of students in Grades 10–12 scored at the Proficient or Advanced levels on the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) English language arts (ELA) and 59.2% of students scored at similar levels in mathematics. Furthermore, the school was concerned that not all students were graduating with college- and career-ready skills.

program, and other college preparatory programs. In conjunction with the International Center and the Successful Practices Network (SPN), LQHS embarked on a five-year school improvement effort to raise school-wide performance on the CAHSEE by implementing a rigorous and relevant curriculum aligned to college and career readiness goals.

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

During the 2005–2006 year, the International Center guided LQHS in assessing their strengths and challenges in order to prioritize areas for improvement, guide curriculum planning, and determine teaching priorities. The tools used for the needs assessment included the Learning Criteria Rubric, the Curriculum Matrix, and the National Essential Skills Study.

### **1. The Learning Criteria Rubric**

The Learning Criteria was developed in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) as part of a five-year initiative to identify and analyze the nation's most successful high school practices and policies for achieving a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students. School leaders were encouraged to use the Learning Criteria Rubric to determine their success in preparing students for current assessments as well as for future roles and responsibilities.

### **2. The National Essential Skills Study (NESS)**

National data from the NESS were used to understand how instructional priorities at LQHS aligned with skills sought by businesses and colleges nationwide. This analysis helped LQHS identify essential standards and skills for the school.

### **3. The Curriculum Matrix**

This tool assigns a priority rating to each state standard in ELA, math, and science based on the emphasis given to that standard on state tests and in the NESS. The International Center helped LQHS use the Curriculum Matrix to prioritize instruction based upon the weight given to each state standard by the California Standards Tests and the CAHSEE.

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

The Learning Criteria guided the first steps in the school's improvement efforts. Results of the NESS survey and the Curriculum Matrix alignment revealed both strengths and challenges for LQHS. The Curriculum Matrix indicated that instructional priorities at LQHS were well-aligned with the essential skills and knowledge emphasized in state tests, in state businesses, and in the nationwide survey. Having validated the curricular focus of their college preparation and career-technical programs, the school was able to determine that instructional quality was the key to raising school-wide academic performance. With support, LQHS developed a plan to raise the quality of instruction by increasing rigor and relevance throughout the school's college preparatory and CTE programs, and by improving data analysis systems.

## **CUSTOMIZED ACTION PLAN**

Over the course of five years, LQHS launched a variety of initiatives aimed at the above goals.

### **Increasing Rigor and Relevance Across College- and Career- Ready Programs**

#### **Ongoing Professional Development**

To increase the rigor and relevance of classroom instruction, LQHS launched a targeted, sustained professional development effort supported by the International Center and SPN. The entire staff participated in a training by the International Center in how to create and convert existing lessons into Gold Seal Lessons, in which students use critical thinking skills with real-world relevance. In addition, a cadre of teachers participated in the Collaborating Online for Rigor and Relevance (CORR) online training provided by the SPN. This core cadre of teachers then provided ongoing support to other teachers in the school to incorporate increased rigor and relevance into their instruction. Each teacher was required to deliver at least two Quadrant D lessons a year. Whether working with students in the career academies or the International Baccalaureate program, teachers throughout the school learned to design educational experiences that reflected what students would actually be asked to do in their chosen technical or academic field.

#### **Strengthening Literacy Instruction**

Beginning in 2008, LQHS launched a Universal Literacy Project to increase academic support for English language arts and improve performance on state and SAT/ACT tests. To better support struggling readers and students transitioning to high school, the school adopted Scholastic's *READ 180* literacy intervention program. In the upper grades, the Universal Literacy Project strengthened the college focus by requiring students to write a 5-paragraph expository essay in each subject over the course of the year. The essays are graded using college and career literacy rubrics developed by an interdisciplinary team.

#### **Increasing Rigor and Relevance in Career-Technical Education Courses**

As part of the reform plan, LQHS put a heavy emphasis on improving curriculum in the school's five career academies: the public service academy, medical health academy, culinary arts institute,

ROTC, and education pathway. Seeking greater relevance, LQHS partnered with local businesses to provide real-world applications of learning through a variety of practical career-related experiences. For example, a job shadowing program was instituted in 11th grade and 12th-grade students were placed in workplace internships. Community representatives also assisted in curriculum development to help ensure that industry requirements were being met. In order to provide CTE students with the same higher education opportunities as other students, the school has also been working on redesigning graduation requirements in the career academies to meet the rigorous prerequisites for admission to the University of California and the California State University systems.

### **Increasing Access to International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement Courses**

As an important step in raising academic expectations across the school, Mrs. Salazer instituted an open access policy for all Advanced Placement (AP) courses. By removing entrance requirements for these courses, the school allowed more students access to rigorous college-level coursework and signaled to teachers that academic expectations should be raised for all students. Students were also provided with the opportunity to take International Baccalaureate (IB) courses without committing to the full-scale program. As a result, over a third of the student body is now enrolled in IB or AP courses.

### **Career Counseling**

LQHS strengthened counseling support for incoming freshmen. Students receive guidance from school counselors regarding career paths and courses of study to help them successfully transition into high school. During their freshman year, students now meet with the counselor to discuss their four-year academic plan and are introduced to the technical and career education programs. Particularly for students who were identified as at-risk in middle school, counselors meet with students throughout the year to follow-up on their progress in meeting graduation requirements and career objectives.

### **Improving Data Analysis Cycle**

Professional learning communities were created so that core curriculum teachers and academy teachers could collaborate regularly to ensure that coursework was in alignment with state standards and students' needs. Each semester, teacher content teams used the NESS and Curriculum Matrix to collaboratively select 8–10 key standards to be addressed in their classes. The teams also created common assessments, curricula, pacing guides, and curriculum maps. The teams met every few weeks to review progress-monitoring data and strategize about how to target instruction to meet the student needs identified by the data.

### **RESULTS**

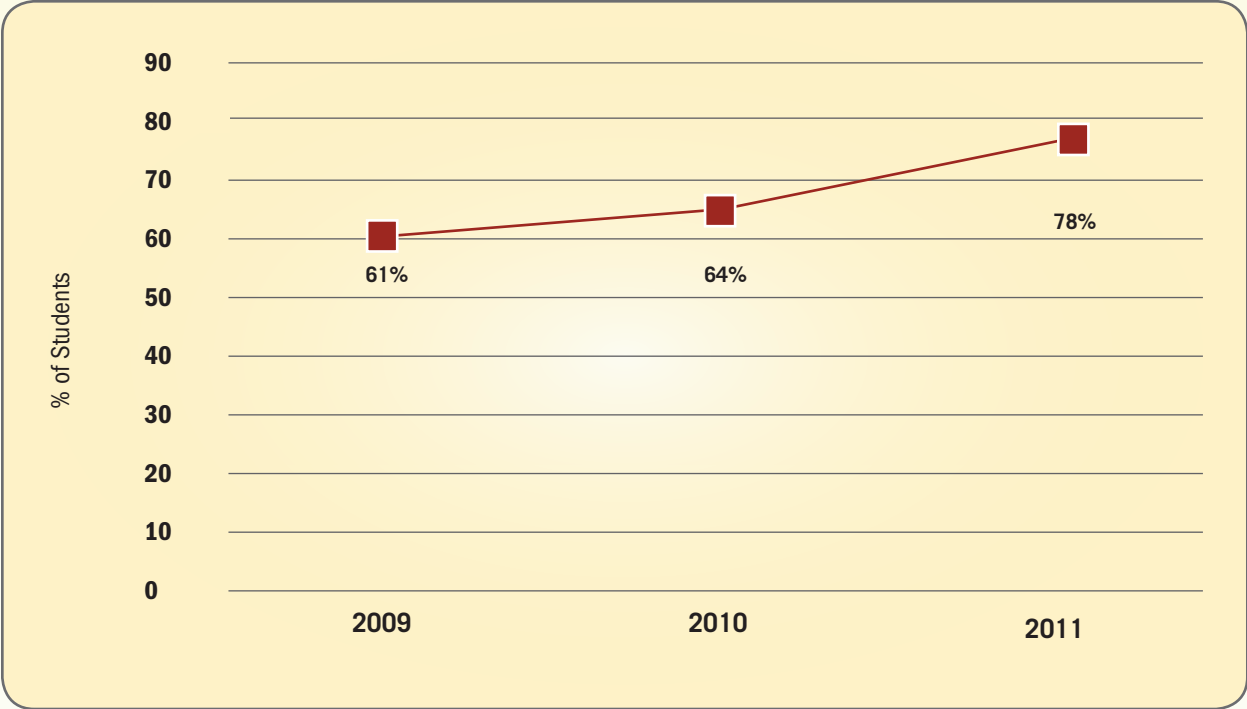
As LQHS worked with the International Center and SPN to carry out their action plan, the school began to see improvements in student performance on the CAHSEE. Graph 1 shows that between 2009 and 2011, the percentage of students scoring at Proficient or Advanced levels on the ELA CAHSEE increased substantially from 61% in 2009 to 78% in 2011. From 2009 to 2011, LQHS also experienced strong gains in the percentage of students achieving Proficiency in mathematics, from 58% to 71% (Graph 2). By 2010, students in the CTE programs had a 100% graduation rate. In 2010, over 90% of LQHS graduates pursued some form of higher education. Over 55% of each graduating class enrolls directly in 4-year colleges and approximately 35% in community colleges.

### **CONCLUSION**

Rejecting the complacency of “good enough”, LQHS used the resources and guidance of the International Center and the SPN to identify significant opportunities to provide its students with the academic and technical skills needed to successfully transition from high school to college or the workplace. The International Center and SPN assisted LQHS in developing programs, courses, and instructional support to improve performance on the CAHSEE. By adding rigor and relevance to instruction while engaging and motivating students, LQHS helped ensure that all students acquire the skills they will need for success in college, career, and beyond.

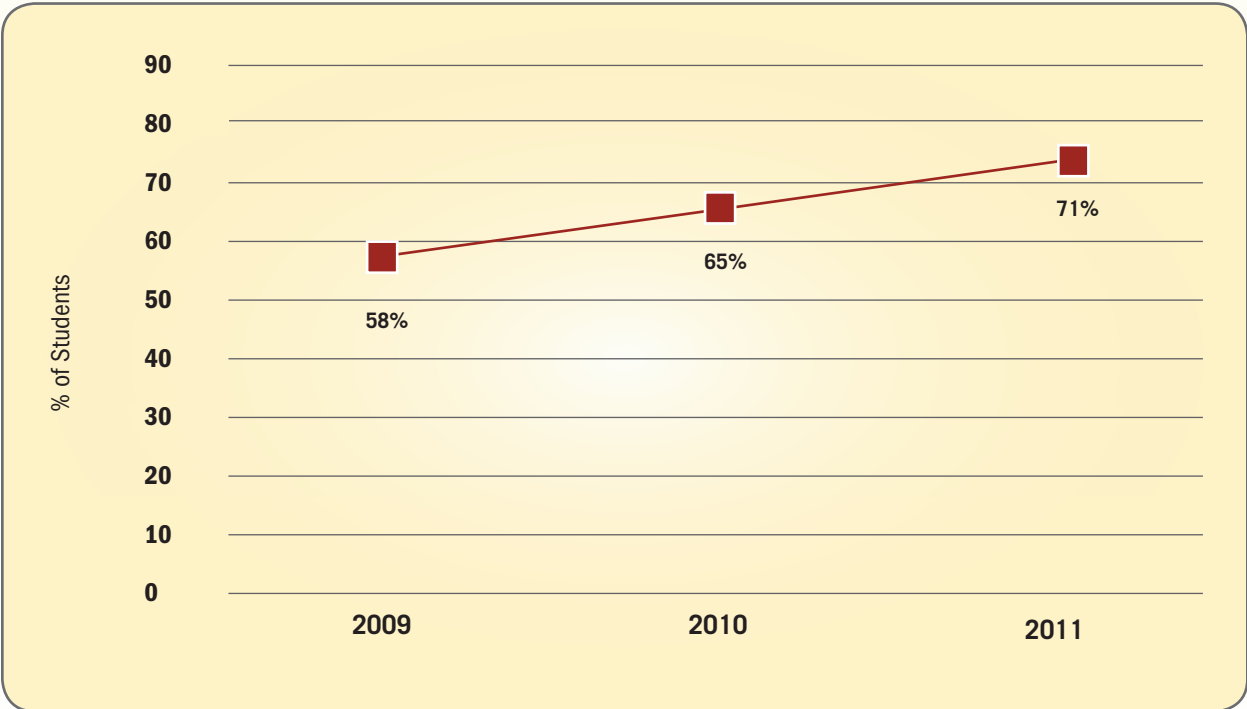
**GRAPH 1**

Percentage of LQHS Students Scoring at Proficient and Advanced Levels on the ELA CAHSEE, Grade 10 (2009–2011)



**GRAPH 2**

Percentage of LQHS Students Scoring at Proficient and Advanced Levels on the Math CAHSEE, Grade 10 (2009–2011)



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