



Executive Summary

Community High School

Ann Arbor Public Schools

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Description of the School.....	2
School's Purpose.....	3
Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement.....	4
Additional Information	6

Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

Community High School is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan (population 110, 900), which is an important scientific, medical and industrial research community with strong appreciation for the arts and major influences from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University. The Ann Arbor Public Schools have 17,000 students and support three comprehensive high schools and two alternative high schools. Two years ago, the district had three alternative high schools. However, in the fall of 2014, the two alternative high school programs that supported the district's most at-risk populations combined to become Pathways to Success Academic Campus. Community High has remained as "The Alternative" to a traditional high school experience and serves students of various backgrounds and achievement levels. Community High School fosters teaching and learning in a small, relationship based environment, where instruction is rigorous and authentic. We have a full curriculum in math, science, English, social studies, world language, physical education, health, and the fine arts, including music, arts, theater and dance. Community High prepares students for a variety of post-secondary options with over 90 percent of students attending colleges and universities.

Students enter Community High through a lottery system in the 9th grade and then remain here through their four years of high school. We typically have between 360 and 480 students put their name into the lottery for the 132 freshman spots that we have. Our population of 533 students at Community is 72% Caucasian and 28% minority. Our minority population breaks down into 5% Hispanic, 5% African American, 6% Asian, 1% Arab American, 10% Multi-Ethnic, and 1% who identify as Other. As a school, we have 20% of our students who receive services or modifications through an IEP (64 students) or 504 Plan (41 students).

We have had some significant changes over the past three years at our school. In the 2013-14 school year, our district brought in a new superintendent. The following school year, our building leadership changed with a new Dean. During that 2014-15 school year, our school was awarded a grant to begin a robotics program and a grant to implement a STEAM focused curriculum with Project Lead the Way (PLTW). That same year, we were asked by the superintendent if there was a way to take more students the following year because the demand was so high for our program. As a staff, we decided to increase our enrollment by 46 students for the 2015-16 school year. With this change, our staffing needs changed and we added an Assistant Dean, increased our teaching staff (2.4 FTE), increased our counseling department from 1.5 counselors to 2 counselor, increased our media specialist to full-time (from .7 FTE), and increased our special education staff to 3 full-time teachers (from 2.5 FTE). Additionally, our four secretary positions are all filled with four office professionals who are new to us in 2015, with the exception of one secretary who is returning to us in a new position after being at another school for several years.

We are making plans with the district to renovate several classrooms and spaces to meet our new needs. We now have most classrooms used almost the entire day with teachers from different departments sharing spaces. This requires us to have more multi-purpose spaces going forward so that we are utilizing all the space in our building in the most efficient way. For example, we have a room being used for art classes and engineering, and another room being used for art and physics.

School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

CHS is a public alternative high school that requires all students use the entire community as a resource for study, and a curriculum that fosters the development of independent learners who practice personal and social responsibility as they prepare for their post-secondary experiences.

VISION STATEMENT

Community High School continues to

- focus on creative and relevant instruction in each content area, including the arts, sciences, letters, world languages, social sciences, mathematics, and STEAM initiatives
- support achievement through research based instructional strategies, positive relationships and integrated content.
- expect equitable awareness in all areas of the school program and provide individualized programs for all students.
- sustain an environment that encourages students to pursue their passions.

BELIEF STATEMENT

We believe in high expectations and high outcomes for all students.

We believe in academic rigor and rich electives.

We believe in diversity of learners and celebration of others.

We believe in connection, voice, ownership and choice.

We believe in a small school environment that systemically provides genuine and caring relationships.

COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL SPECIFICS

Our students are offered a wide range of courses in 100 minute alternating blocks with 55 minute classes on Fridays, none of which are tracked. Students may take classes at our large, traditional high schools, Pioneer, Huron, or Skyline High School. Students from those schools may also select Community classes. Additionally, our students are encourage to take Community Resource (CR) classes and online classes as part of their high school experience, and all students take Forum for all four years with the same teacher and students in every grade. Our students do this while operating in a school without bells, with an open campus, no hall passes, free periods without classes, and where students call their teachers by their first name. Our school is based on relationships, trust, student voice, and a sincere desire to learn together.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Community High School has faced several challenges and opportunities in the past three years that have caused us to reflect, learn, and grow as an educational institution. The increased state and district mandates along with the budget cuts that we have endured in the Ann Arbor Public Schools have summoned us to be more vigilant about maintaining the quality of our school given these new challenges. Additionally, we have challenged ourselves with the task of increasing our student population and student diversity so that it is more reflective of the Ann Arbor student body. We have met these challenges and opportunities while also going through transitions of leadership.

At Community, we are trying to maintain our professional autonomy to provide rich, integrated content in creative and unique ways and still meet the Common Core Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and graduation expectations with less money. We continue to maintain our mission and vision while many of the pillars that define our school are tested by the demands of our district and the state to be more uniform and to fit into a particular mold; this concept is completely counter to many of values at Community that include an appreciation for doing things differently.

Community has had tremendous student success as measured by our test scores, student comments in their graduation speeches, and increased interest in our school by prospective families. We continue to have ACT scores in the top 1% of the state, with only a few schools beating us each year. We have been a Reward School every year since the state made this possible, and have been named a "Beat the Odds School," and ranked the 13th best school in Newsweek in 2014. It is really hard to quantify the ingredients in the special recipe of Community High School when we haven't traditionally focused our curriculum on test scores, but instead have focused our efforts on building a school that values relationships, individuality, acceptance of others, giving students a voice, service learning, allowing teachers the freedom to take chances and try new creative ideas, assuring that students learning experiences are authentic, and teaching students personal and social responsibility, all while teaching a rigorous curriculum. We have been able to meet the new demands without letting to much of our secret sauce spill out by always coming back to our mission and vision that are student centered and focus on learning and relationships.

As we continue to struggle to close the achievement gap, one of the goals we identified was to increase our minority population to mirror the population in Ann Arbor. We came to this goal several years ago with staff and student discussions around equity and what was missing for some of our students in our instruction and environment at Community High School. What was missing for our minority students was more students who looked like them; and so began a quest to increase our minority student population. Our data shows that we are seeing some success in this area and we believe that it is due to a systemic initiative that includes ongoing reading and discussion around the topic of race and a huge emphasis on changing our recruitment process that was lead by our School Improvement Team and Diversity Council of students. Considerable effort was made to ensure that all groups of students that went out to educate potential 8th graders at the middle schools were representative of all sub-groups at Community High School; this same effort was made for our five student and parent information nights that families must attend in order for their application to be accepted. Additionally these past two years, we made an effort to hold two of our five information sessions at Scarlett and Clague middle schools, which have the highest percentage of minority students, yet has traditionally been the least represented in the applications we have received. Other changes included providing our application in Spanish and having Spanish-speaking parents at our information sessions. Attention was also given to add services to our school to make it more accessible to students with less income; those services include a hot lunch program (new to our school), and free bus passes for families in financial need. Our data is showing that we are having some success with this; our school had a 75% Caucasian population last school year, compared to 72% this year. Our increased efforts over the last two years specifically, show in our current freshman and sophomore classes, where there is a 68% and 69% Caucasian population. We still have work to do; our district has a 51% Caucasian population.

Community High School is such a special place and it is really hard to explain it to anyone to a level where we feel he or she "gets it." It

Executive Summary

Community High School

takes a lot of conversations, being here to be a part of our many traditions, seeing forum in action, seeing our students in action, watching how our staff and students all step up to leadership roles when they identify a need, participating in a Forum day and a Field Day, and watching a graduation where all students get to talk. So it takes a year or two of seeing all of these to really understand how we do things differently here; this becomes challenging when we have a change in Deans, a new superintendent, and new Assistant Dean, all new secretaries, and so many new teachers. However, we meet this challenge like we meet all others, with individual attention, understanding, a drive to be the best, and compassion.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

We regularly have visitors from all over the state and country coming to learn what we do at our school. It is really hard to fully understand until you become a part of the fabric of the school for a few years. However, one way to best get to know our school is to read the articles and see the videos that are included in our 100% student run news publication, The Communicator. This is now printed as a news magazine every 6 weeks and has an online edition at www.chscommunicator.com.