Continuous Improvement Plan

NOTE 1

1. **ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY**

   BIMODAL ACHIEVEMENT: Ten years of data, show a bi-modal pattern of achievement on trimester grades. Roughly 35-40% of our students tend to fail one or more classes every trimester. Over the past 10 years we have become more academically rigorous. We have seen that students who fail often demonstrate competency on large projects in courses but do not perform consistently throughout an entire course or several courses. They tend to show inconsistent work habits and academic skills.

   MATH ACHIEVEMENT: Over the last 4 years we have had turn over in our math and science department. There has also been turn-over in math and science teachers at the elementary school. We believe this contributed to a decline in scores on SBAC testing and other achievement tests. Previously, there was more coordination in the curriculum in math and science, and we had consistent math teachers.

   CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING INTEGRATION OF NEW STAFF:
   We have found that new staff have difficulties their first years of teaching at the Academy because of our focus on rigorous project-based instruction, supported by three well-equipped maker's spaces. Also, the Academy blends Critical Exploration, a constructivist approach to learning, into project-based units. The issue of agency, voice and choice that these forms of instruction give students also frees teachers to follow their own passions in unit designs. Like well-developed, rigorous projects, learning to teach at Rivendell involves a balance between freedom and structure. Often the structure of curriculum at RA can be illusive to new teachers, as the principles structuring learning are more philosophical and psychological in nature than technical. These forms of pedagogy focus on student agency in learning.
   At RA there is a fundamental shift from rigid, traditional forms of curriculum documents and documentation that is itself educative to new staff about how to think and plan curriculum around essential questions supported by teacher made materials and activities that build into unique projects and exhibitions. Issues of assessment, scaffolding and choice require high degree of skill. The documents need to capture these complexities. Changes in our instructional approach, new essential questions, examples of projects and exhibitions, new forms of assessment, and completely new courses need to be updated in our curriculum documents.

2. **SAFE & HEALTHY SCHOOLS**
   FAILURE AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS:
   Of the students who habitually fail one or more courses at the Academy, we have seen a growing number of academically skilled students who fail academically because of mental health issue, lack of support from the home and/or executive functioning issues. This group of students is reflected in the large group of students who struggle academically but they have identifiable issues that set them apart and put them at greater risk of failure. Many of these students manage to learn skills in middle school, but they often failed classes in 7th and 8th grade. Although many of the students in this group have been tested for special education as a result of the EST process, their learning and good academic skills make them ineligible for the more personal and direct support available

through special education. Especially in 9ᵗʰ grade they struggle with the requirements of more independent learning. This group of students is identified by both low achievement in middle school and high incidents of disciplinary issues and/or identified social/ emotional issues. Failing and feeling unsupported these students face an increased risk of dropping out.

3. **PERSONALIZED LEARNING**
PROJECT-BASED LEARNING/ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
We have found that rigorous, well scaffolded projects support student engagement because it allows more personalization of learning. We have ample evidence in curated student work, that well-designed projects engage 100% of the students and result in high quality work from all students. We have new faculty that need professional development in producing quality projects. A part of the professional development involves introducing new faculty to the technology and equipment in our Makers' Spaces.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS:
A key element of personalize learning is the ability to reflect on one's learning, growth and areas of improvement. We seek to increase our students' ability to reflect on their performance and learning, especially in terms of 21ˢᵗ century skills of teamwork, problem solving, addressing community needs, communicating effectively to an audience, and using technology to create an effective digital portfolio.

NOTE 2
1. **ACADEMIC PROFICIANCY**: 1) BIMODAL ACHIEVEMENT, 2) MATH ACHIEVEMENT, 3) CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS
2. **SAFE & HEALTHY SCHOOLS:** FAILURE AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
3. **PERSONALIZED LEARNING:** DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS

NOTE 3

1. **ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY/** BIMODAL ACHIEVEMENT

There are a host of causes in the educational literature about school failure:

1. Various mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and PTSD
2. Autism and associated difficulties with social interaction
3. Specific Learning disabilities
4. **Work habits, executive functioning**
5. **Lack of basic skills**
6. **Low confidence, motivation, student's sense of self-efficacy**
7. Poverty and associated problems such as food scarcity, homelessness, lack of supervision, lack of space for schoolwork, limited life experiences, lack of academic support from home.
8. Cultural differences between home and school; implicit bias.

Our analysis has led us to focus on issues 4-6.

2. **ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY/** MATH ACHIEVEMENT
RA had a history of high literacy achievement as measured by standardized assessments and low achievement in math and science. Starting around 2012 that began to change as a result of changes in the science curriculum, changes in the teaching staff and stability of the math science teaching staff. Also, in 2012 the math teachers from 5th and 6th grade, middle school, and high school met weekly to discuss curriculum and instruction and pose questions for investigating students' math knowledge. The stability of the math staff became less stable from 2016-2020. Also, last year there was a significant changing in teaching staff in the elementary school feeding RA. We see instable staffing and subsequent lack of collaboration as major causes of our decline in math scores.

3. **ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY/** CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING INTEGRATION OF NEW STAFF
Staff turn-over however infrequent is a natural occurrence in schools. In schools like RA that have developed deep, shared set of values and practices related to instruction though extensive professional development and teacher collaboration, a new teacher can feel overwhelmed with the task of understanding and adapting and contributing to the academic culture of the school. The mentoring process at the Academy revolves around a co-teaching model where an experience teacher works in the classroom with a new teacher. This does not address the issue of proving new teachers with curriculum documents that will help them know where and how to begin in organizing instruction in the classroom. This issue is important at RA in that we do not use traditional textbooks or standardized curriculum maps that might be familiar to new teachers. careful curriculum documentation has been started but not co

4. **SAFE & HEALTHY SCHOOLS/** FAILURE AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
Within the group of students at risk of failing one or more classes, there is a sub-group that are especially vexing because they have been tested but denied entry to special education because they do not fall below the 15th percentile in an academic area. For most of these students there is also low parental support. With these students there tends to be one or two risk factors that have been identified through by the Education Support Team. Also, there are not barriers to success that can be put in place through a 504 that could support success. Typically, these students fail multiple classes and can become regularly involved in disciplinary issues.

5. **PERSONALIZED LEARNING:** DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS
Currently we do not have a system for teachers and student to use to develop digital portfolios that allow students to document and reflect upon their growth as learners and identify areas for improvement.

NOTE 4/ Theory of Improvement

Our theory of improvement identifies learning into areas of basic skills and essential stills. Basic skills include work habits and knowledge that we expect students to have "on tap" such as basic math skills, writing skills and reading skills. Essential skills involve higher order thinking—critical thinking skills, reflection on teamwork/ collaboration/ and communication; design and planning skills, independent learning etc. To address the pattern of bimodal achievement we will develop a program of school-wide assessments and checklists for work habits that will be applied school-wide. To address math

achievement, we will reinstate weekly meetings of math teachers in grades 5-12. To address the failure of non-special education students we will develop a program in for a select group of students in 9th and 10th grade who meet a specific set of criteria that put them at greater risk of dropping out. To help to support students' reflection on their learning we will develop a systematic digital portfolio system in grades 7-12.

Note 5 previous goals

Goals

- EST system
- Student data system/ assessment system
- Trauma/ mental health
- Disciplinary system
- Teacher Evaluation System

Related change ideas

- EST process involving all teachers working in teams (grade level teams) regularly with administration
- Systematic spreadsheet of common academic indicators for all students
- Systematic use of a single reading assessment in grades 5-10
- Expert presenters in areas of suicide prevention, trauma, and student mental health and enw counseling and health curriculum

Measures

- Document meeting notes from grade level team meetings for the year.
- Completed spreadsheet of Academic indicators
- Implemented the STAR reading assessment in grades 5-10
- Held 7 inservice presentations on Trauma, suicide preventions and student mental health
- Hired WeRHope to work with students suffering from anxiety and/ or depression
- Implemented a 7th and 8th grade counseling course taken by all 7th and 8th graders
- Implemented a new health curriculum
- No progress on teacher evaluation system

Results/Progress

- Grade level teams increased communication with parents and information about students was shared among relevant teaches. Improved referral process for special education. Developed a comprehensive data system for students that followed students.
- Used Academic indicators and STAR reading assessment to place students in Title I reading support
- Increased staff awareness and skills in the areas of student mental health.
- Provided increased mental health support for approximately 20 students.