

Oakland Unified School District

Think College Now Elementary School

**2825 International Blvd.
Oakland, California
94601**

Principal: David Silver

Dates of review: May 20 - 21, 2009

Reviewer: Sue Jamback

Cambridge Education (LLC)

Team Members	
Juwen Lam	Coordinator of School Portfolio Management



Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main findings

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Think College Now Elementary School (TCN) is a public K-5 elementary school that opened six years ago as part of the Oakland Unified School District's small schools initiative. The vision of the school is to ensure that all students have the tools to choose their life path with an equitable opportunity to attend college. TCN believes that with an early start, college focused students will reach their goals. The student body of 266 students shares a beautifully designed campus with another public school. Enrollment at Think College Now by ethnicity is 63 percent Latino, 18 percent African American, 8 percent Asian, and 9 percent multiethnic. The school's proportion of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch is 92 percent, which is twenty points higher than the district average of 71 percent. English language learners comprise 55 percent of the total school population, which is higher than the district average of 31 percent. The percentage of students who qualify for special education services is lower than the district average at 12 percent. Average daily attendance is high at 96 percent and is slightly higher than the district average.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The school outperforms other district schools. Academic growth has steadily increased over time.
- The curriculum and instruction at TNC is standards-based and teachers and students monitor mastery closely.
- Data displays are public and provide evidence of the school's focus on results.
- Strong, visionary leadership has established a shared commitment to the school's mission and vision amongst all stakeholders. The mission and vision provides families with high aspirations for the future.
- The school works diligently to support the student and family. High levels of parent involvement and support are a key factor in the school's success.
- Students feel safe and like their school. Most students have adjusted well to the high expectations and college focus.

Areas for improvement:

- Improve classroom instruction and active student engagement by:
 - more closely monitoring lesson planning and execution
 - increasing the transparency of learning objectives for students in daily lessons
 - promoting student-to-student interaction during instruction
- Address the needs of 40-50 percent of the student population not yet demonstrating proficiency and ensure the continuous progress for all students by:
 - establishing clear expectations for the use of PLC's and common planning
 - refining and instituting common best practices across the school
 - shifting the school's focus away from relative performance to absolute performance to more rapidly meet the school's goal of 90 percent of all students performing at the proficient level

OVERALL EVALUATION: THE SCHOOL'S OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Think College Now has established itself as a local leader and innovator and is a rapidly improving school aspiring to become a great school. This is evidenced by the continuous increase in state tests scores over time and the high levels of parent and student satisfaction with the school. The school's record of student achievement indicates that TNC has positively impacted the learning of many students, and some students in certain grades demonstrate high levels of academic achievement in core subjects. In the vast majority of grades tested, TCN students outperform their local peers and peers from across California. The school's academic performance index (API) has also increased dramatically since the founding of the school and experienced a slight decline in the last round of state testing. The school's laser-like focus on results is evidenced by frequent and detailed monitoring of student performance on state tests and on interim benchmark tests. The current performance level of every student is known well by leaders and teachers and is a hallmark of the school's data-driven culture. Accompanying goal setting and interventions have yet to produce the ambitious yet attainable results to which the school aspires: that at least 90 percent of students will perform at the proficient level or higher. Some students in each class are only vaguely aware of why they are working on certain tasks.

The effectiveness of the school's diligence on tracking performance is compromised by the school's less than diligent approach to the practice of making learning objectives clear and understood by students. Under-engaged students do not know what it is they are expected to learn due to their lack of awareness of the purpose of the activity. Instruction, provided by skilled and competent teachers, meets the needs of about 50 percent of the students who are highly motivated and able to complete independent tasks. The overall school climate is very supportive of students and families. The school's successful efforts to create a climate that is conducive to learning has created an atmosphere where busy and engaged students focus on the task of work completion and they do so with respectful compliance with the school's high behavioral expectations for them.

The school's ambitious and committed leader has crafted a clear mission which is shared by most staff and by parents. The principal and all other staff consistently monitor student achievement and use data to identify students for interventions. The school effectively combines all of its available resources of time, funds, and people with fundraising to provide a comprehensive support network for the entire school community. The school's sincere interest in working with parents and numerous effective structures for parent participation has resulted in high rates of parent volunteerism and parent satisfaction. High expectations for parent participation in conjunction with school-based support for parent development has resulted in mutually beneficial home/school partnerships. This leads to increased interest in schooling and high hopes for fulfilling and productive career options for the students of Think College Now.

Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects

The students' achievement meets expectations.

The relative average performance of the students of Think College Now is high when compared to elementary schools from across the state. The percentage of TCN students at the proficient level or higher on the California State Test (CST) is significantly higher than the state by 20 points in grade two. All grades are slightly higher than state levels, except fifth grade where they show a 15 point deficit. The average performance of the students at TNC is high when compared to other elementary schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). The percentage of students at the proficient level or higher on the CST is significantly higher than the district by nearly 30 points in grade two. TCN outperforms the district by 15-20 points in all grades but one. Achievement over time has varied at TCN but cumulative improvement is quite evident rising over 200 points from the initial academic performance index (API) score of 585. The API has

risen sharply since the school's inception. The school's current API shows a slight decline from its previous high of 781 points.

- The absolute performance of students on the CST has improved over time. Baseline scores for English Language Arts (ELA) were 8 percent of the students scoring at the proficient level or higher rising to 54 percent in the most recent test administration. Scores in math have also risen steadily over time from a baseline of 29 percent of students scoring at the proficient level to 63 percent in 2008.
- The performance of the school's small number of special education students is a great deal lower than the school as a whole or than other subgroups as demonstrated by 16 percent of students scoring proficient in ELA and 28 scoring proficient in math.
- The school has closed the achievement gap between subgroups when using API as the metric. There is little variability between the scores of Hispanic, socioeconomically disadvantaged and English learners. Each of these subgroups performed within a few points of each other.
- Comparisons of absolute performance of these groups show greater disparity. The small number of Asian students at TCN outperform all other groups at the school by 30 points in ELA and Math. Hispanic students are the lowest scoring subgroup in both math and ELA (excluding students with disabilities) with just 44 percent proficient on the ELA CST and 57 percent at the proficient level in math. African American students score higher than Hispanic students by 20 points in ELA and only slightly outperform this group in math. Gender comparisons also show disparities between males and females in some grades.
- The school sets performance goals for students who are below proficient levels and monitors progress regularly. Its efforts to move students out of the lowest levels on the CST was recognized by the OUSD as the school that moved the most students out of the lowest ELA performance level with just approximately 16 percent of students remaining below basic on the ELA and math CST.

Criterion 2: The quality of learning and instruction provided, including quality of teaching, curriculum, assessment, and the use of performance data to promote learning.

This area of the school's work meets expectations.

Think College Now strives to increase academic achievement through its "data driven culture and actions" and has developed sophisticated methods and procedures to closely monitor state test results and interim benchmark progress. There is a less intent focus on monitoring the quality of teaching and the delivery of instruction. There is an inconsistent approach to the execution of best practices across the school. The quality of instruction, student experience and level of academic achievement varies from class to class. The posting and/or communication of learning objectives is not a common practice across the majority of the classrooms. Students are able to communicate what it is they are doing in each class using general terms, such as "we are doing math." Students are generally unaware of the purpose of the activity or what skills they are to learn as a result of completing their work, thus they are not clear about what it is they are to be learning and why.

The use of rubrics in the writing process is evidenced across the school and some students report that they sometimes use rubrics to score their own work. Students understand what is considered "a 4" in their writing assignments but use rubrics less on other academic tasks. For example, students are beginning science fair projects without the benefit of a rubric to ensure they meet the standards for the project from the onset. Many students are independent in some classes and manage their independent practice time with maturity and purposefulness. Students manage binders and boxes of materials and in some, but not all classes are actively engaged in tracking their own achievement and work completion data thus some students are developing the college ready skills of self-direction and work ethic more successfully than others.

Teachers are provided with shared office spaces and weekly planning time within which to collaborate with teachers who teach the same grade. Teachers sometimes opt to plan together and traditional daily lesson planning is left to individuals and is not monitored for quality or rigor. Individual lesson planning is not viewed as the driver of instruction nor a big focus of teachers' time. Rather, teachers design daily instruction to address state standards which are captured in long term plans and ensure the teaching of state standards.

TCN's yearly cycle of assessment and data analysis is clearly documented and provides leaders and teachers with a comprehensive tool used to move students into the proficient range on state tests. Every six weeks the leaders and teachers meet to examine student benchmark data and to plan intervention strategies. This results in students receiving recognition for growth and provides teachers with concrete next steps to address deficits. The six week goals conferences put names to data and students are sorted by those on pace to meet goals and those falling short. Teachers and leaders effectively collaborate on next steps and the four step cycle ensures that goals are set and revisited every six weeks keeping continuous improvement at the forefront. Interim monitoring is not done to assure that staff are following through on the plans. Teachers are granted the professional responsibility of self-monitoring which has yet to ensure maximum impact of this system. Grade level teachers record student mastery on power standards and staff are assigned roles in the intervention process.

The level of detail on the action plan provides the staff with the clarity it needs to know who is responsible for delivering on the plan and the projected dates of delivery of service. The TCN yearly cycle of assessment and data analysis provides a structure and formal system to support continuous improvement but has yet to move all students into the proficient level. Homework and extended day activities are used to reinforce learning and to build work ethic. Students learn responsibility and the consequences of not completing homework are experienced at loss of recess time. Based on the examination of a variety of test data, the school has identified reading comprehension as a target area for professional development. Teachers are at the early stages of implementing the Readers' Workshop instructional approach at the school.

Criterion 3: School environment and fostering the development of students' personal character

This area of the school's work exceeds expectations.

The school and classroom environment is supported by the five values of TNC which include: Responsibility, Respect, Reflect, College, and Ganas- an attitude of never giving up, all of which contribute to a culture of high expectations and achievement. Think College Now has created a safe and orderly environment that compels students to attend school regularly and to take pride in their accomplishments. Students are recognized in weekly assemblies for behavior and improvement. The students earn "panther paws" which are used to acknowledge accomplishments. All students aspire to college and express confidence that higher education is in their futures.

The atmosphere at TCN is warm and welcoming. Students understand that they are expected to act as scholars and follow rules and procedures with little reminding. To support students in building constructive relationships with peers all students are trained in conflict resolution techniques and actively practice restitution and conflict management as needed. Each day, after recess, students are afforded 10 minutes to reflect on issues that arise while at play thus re-establishing a classroom environment for teaching and learning. Students contribute to the school community by serving as classroom greeters and numerous students serve on the student council. The school's annual calendar of cultural heritage events provides students with knowledge and experience with aspects of the various cultures represented at the school. The degree to which some students demonstrate independence and show initiative is impressive. Students work independently while teachers confer with other students, and in some classes students move from center to center, aware of the tasks they are to complete. Cooperative learning is utilized in some classes more than others and students are assigned leadership roles within their groups to support each others' learning. The school closely monitors daily attendance and employs a part-time counsellor who works with several interns to deliver a comprehensive support system to students and parents.

Criterion 4: Effective school management and leadership.

This area of the school's work meets expectations.

The school's vision and mission of college for all students is evident throughout the school and is represented in artifacts and actions. Wall displays of college banners and student created maps to college indicate that there is a cohesive message about college as a valuable life experience. Most staff are philosophically aligned with the concept/philosophy of college for all and are engaged in closely monitoring the academic achievement of students to ensure that each student is progressing towards proficiency. Some individual staff note that the school sacrifices college readiness for the sake of test scores and most of these staff members feel comfortable raising their concerns about this.

The school employs a full time Director of Strategy and Operations who has been instrumental in creating long term plans to guide the school in the areas of staffing, instructional planning, and budget planning. The school has developed several detailed long term plans to document its methods and results. The Single Plan for Student Achievement is detailed and comprehensive and targets are based on current baseline performance. Envisioned performance targets are clear and reasonable and are effectively producing results. The principal shares leadership which is distributed beyond the administrative team and includes teachers and parents. The staff opted within the last year to elect a leadership team with representatives from various grade levels and this team meets weekly to conduct such business as planning the upcoming staff retreat and to discuss and resolve constituent concerns. Leadership team meetings are open to all staff thus creating an environment of transparency and accountability.

The school is in the early stages of implementing Professional Learning Communities yet teachers within grade levels use common planning time well to collaborate as they choose. Each teacher meets with an administrator every six weeks to review progress of students. At these goals conferences new targets are set for some students and detailed interventions are mapped out for those who have not progressed. Teachers take personal responsibility for delivering on the targets and goals and are left to self-monitor throughout the six-week cycle knowing that they expect to be held accountable at the next goals conference. The six-week continuous improvement cycle is firmly embedded in the culture and practices as TNC and is vital for the establishment of interventions. Staff report that this autonomy to choose your own path to student growth is both a strength and a weakness. The principal's current informal policy of professional judgement allows teachers to freely employ practices that "work for them without being wedded to how to get there" which has contributed to some variances in the quality of instruction across classrooms.

TNC leadership has staffed the school with bright, eager, and talented teachers. Teachers consider their six week goal conferences as a defacto evaluation and teachers are observed formally three times per year and receive informal feedback via email. Some teachers are observed more consistently due to the needs of the teachers. Leadership at TCN has committed to raising funds to augment the per pupil allocation from the district. The school is well resourced with staff, materials, and classroom computers that are key to interventions in math and reading. Accelerated Reader and a similar skill-based math program are motivating to students and are directly impacting reading progress and improvement in math computation and problem solving.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

This area of the school's work exceeds expectations.

Think College Now values parents as partners and works diligently to engage parents in the learning process and the development of school programs. The school's parent goal to engage and create family partnerships to support student achievement has fostered a parent friendly environment and created very high levels of parent participation. Parents are invited to be active volunteers and their presence in classrooms, the cafeteria, and on the playground provide those who can contribute in this way with opportunities to add considerable value to the school. Each classroom has two parent representatives who are instrumental in contacting other parents via phone when communication is needed to supplement the school's weekly home-

school communication folder that is sent home and return signed. Parent volunteers assist in the distribution of the home-school folder and the tracking of parent signatures.

Parents and teachers are expected to interact minimally at report card time, parents are required to come to school to receive their children's report cards and contact is instigated with parents who need assistance getting to the school for this purpose. The school uses the district report cards and some staff augment the report card scores with anecdotal reports which provide some parents with more detailed information about their child's progress. The school values parent voice and encourages parents to join one of three standing committees: School Site Council (SSC), English Language Advisory Council, and Ethnic Heritage Studies Committee. The SSC is comprised of parents, teachers and staff and all members are allowed to vote on school related issues. TCN recognizes that parents are children's first teachers and provides on-site parent education to support parents as they help their children learn and as they strive to reach their own educational goals. Parents can attend English as a Second Language class at the school during the day and learn "the language of school communication" and how to advocate for their child to teachers and leaders.

A variety of parent workshops are scheduled throughout the year in partnership with four key partners. UC Berkley provides college-going culture workshops. The school's staffed Family Resource Center (FRC) offers parents and grandparents a comfortable space and coffee and serves as a hub for school volunteers. Parents report using the computers to search for jobs and social services. Three parents are trained to teach Spanish to students in Kindergarten and first grade. Parents sign parent compacts which clearly outline the expectations for healthy and productive school and home partnerships. Parents are welcome to attend monthly celebrations at the school and do so in large numbers. The depth and breadth of parent partnerships at Think College Now is a contributing factor to the school's ability to educate its students.