

Mid-cycle Visiting Committee Summary Report

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

FOR

Aragon High School

**900 Alameda de las Pulgas
San Mateo, CA 94402**

San Mateo Union High School District

Original Visit:

March 13-15, 2018

Visiting Committee Members

Dane Caldwell-Holden, Chairperson
Director, Student Services, SJUSD

Mr. David Bigelman
English Teacher, Fremont High School

SUMMARY

Background: Aragon primarily serves students from feeder schools in Hillsborough, Foster City and San Mateo. Since the initial visit, enrollment has 1733 students, an increase of nearly one hundred more students. Space at Aragon is in demand, so the school is consistently enrolled at whatever capacity is set by the district and maintains a substantial waiting list every year. Academically, Aragon has maintained higher than average test scores and graduation rates. Having said that, there has been a general decline in Math and English each of the past three years. Aragon has maintained a 96% graduation rate throughout.

Changes: Since the initial visit, the school has welcomed a new principal and replaced its administrator of discipline with a new Assistant Principal. The school has also begun using the MTSS model to support student engagement and positive behavior. Aragon has created a Student Wellness Center that serves as a safe space for students and addresses student concerns about centrally housing that staff. Aragon also reformed its internal communications systems, providing teachers with a one-stop resource guide for whatever they might need and also creating a Request for Assistance form that any staff member could use to relay their concerns about a student (academics, behavior, mental health, etc....).

Stakeholder Engagement: One of Aragon's greatest strengths is its ability to involve all stakeholder groups in the creation and implementation of its goals and action plans. The visiting team spoke with a number of staff, students, parents and community members, all of whom spoke well about the work the school continues to do.

Progress on Action Plans: Aragon High has continued to follow the three Action Plans it created and then revised after the last WASC visit. The staff remains committed to following these plans and revising them as needed. Although the transition to virtual learning has been painful for all parties, Aragon has striven to support its students as best as it can and has not stopped most work in the Action Plans (as appropriate).

Schoolwide Strengths

1. School Connection and Community

- a. Parents and students both expressed the strong sense of community and connection they feel with the school. This feeling has been strained during distance learning, but served to underscore how strong the connection is. Both parents and students are very excited to return to campus and reconnect.
- b. Students reiterated statements we heard at the last visit about being able to find a place at Aragon where they felt they belonged. The school has a wide variety of activities and clubs that cater to many different students.

- c. Students feel connected to each other even in different groups. For example, students on yearbook are comfortable attending and writing about sports, music and other school activities.

2. Multiple Academic Programs and Interventions

- a. Students are well supported in Algebra I through a separate tutorial session and in Freshman English through a second section of English called Strategic English Support.
- b. Aragon offers a large number of classes at different skill levels in many subjects, including Link Crew and an Ethnic Studies elective course for underclassmen and dual enrollment courses for specific ethnicities at the local community college for juniors and seniors.

3. Wellness Program/Counselors

- a. Students really appreciate the wellness program and their counselors. They worry that the social stigma around mental health is preventing some students from accessing services. Students and staff overwhelmingly reported on the growth and success of the wellness program and the need for more counseling resources once they return.

Growth Areas for Continuous Improvement: The visiting committee concurs with the school's identified areas for growth:

Finalized Critical Student Learning Needs

- 1) Provide students and families a comprehensive social and emotional learning program that helps them to manage stress, achieve a better school/life balance and improve their social/emotional wellness. (II)
- 2) Make Aragon's discipline and academic ethics policies, practices and communication systems more clear and consistently enforced to maximize the school's productivity, integrity, and physical and emotional security. (II)
- 3) Significantly increase the percentage of students in high-priority groups (English Learners, Special Education, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, Latino and Polynesian students) who earn C's or better and who meet or exceed standard on all portions of the CAASPP exam. (I/III)
- 4) Make the academic program more inclusive and inspiring by preparing students for *all* types of post-secondary education and careers. This includes building more robust career and CTE pathways and better informing students and families about a wider variety of post-graduation options and how to pursue them. (I/III)

Additional Comments from the VC:

1. **Increase access to the Wellness Program and expansion of Culturally Relevant Course offerings** (Action Plan II, Goal 1: "Develop Aragon's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to create an integrated and cohesive system of academic, behavioral, and social emotional learning support at all tiers." And Action Plan III Goal 3: "Explore the structure and offerings in the elective program in order to reflect student interests and ensure that all students are represented in the AHS curriculum.")

- a. Continue PD around social concerns like Black Lives Matters and Social Justice and increase Intercultural understanding - Students enjoy the diversity of the school and would like to have more conversations about race and ethnicity to help build more understanding across cultural groups. Students requested, and we concur, that additional time could be invested by teachers in learning about and then facilitating classroom discussions about these topics.
 - b. Continue to work to break the stigma of mental health counseling and social emotional learning.
 - c. After distance learning, continue to use Zoom for online counseling sessions with individuals and large groups. Counselors noted the effectiveness of hosting large groups through Zoom that are harder to reach when they need to come to campus.
2. **More specifically measure the level of success of interventions and programs** (Action Plan II, Goal 3: “Further develop Tier 1 elements of the wellness program and institute a more dynamic set of Tier 2 interventions to provide targeted and timely support to students in need.”)
- a. The sheer number of programs and interventions makes it difficult to tell which ones are having a worthwhile impact. For example, the MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) seems to have a lot of parts. Find ways to differentiate core pieces and evaluate the effectiveness of each piece. Looking at entry and exit criteria may be helpful.
3. **Share Grading Practices** (Action Plan I, Goal 2: “Come to a research- based consensus; commit to some shared grading and homework practices to make feedback and grades more meaningful and to encourage all students’ success.”)
- a. Continue developing shared grading practices across courses, departments, and the school and use the shared practices to try and figure out why some groups of students are more successful than others.
 - b. Investigate the Grade / Test Score Gap - Possible Questions to continue the conversation:
 - i. Do the skills taught and work assigned in AP and CP classes line up with the skills on the big tests?
 - ii. Are the CP classes rigorous enough? Is it the same in each department?
 - iii. Are all of our courses aligned to grade level standards that are core to the disciplines?
 - iv. Are assignments and assessments in CP classes rigorous enough to support struggling students achieve at higher levels?