

# LIBRA Academy

Pilot School

*Balancing Character, Mind, and Well-being*



Public School Choice 3.0  
South Region High School #7

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## **Design Team History: 2007-8**

LIBRA *Academy* emerged from a series of conversations and inspirations that were sparked by the famous “blue memo” that was circulated at Huntington Park High School to the entire staff. The “blue memo” invited all Huntington Park high school stakeholders to sign-up in response to their interest in starting an “experimental” small school on the campus of the high school. A group of 14 teachers agreed to meet on a Sunday to create a position paper and submit general ideas to the current principal. Two National Board Certified Social Science teachers proceeded to organize with the plan, navigating a political firestorm between UTLA and the Board of Education.

The team worked tirelessly into the evenings and during weekends, writing drafts of the school plan, eliciting support to get the school to the operational stage. Those on the design team welcomed the opportunity to create an innovative school that would provide a creative learning environment in a neighborhood school that had a reputation of social promotion, a high drop out rate, and a dismal record of college matriculation. The teacher-led education effort brought about much needed reforms that cut through bureaucratic largess that has plagued this urban district. This autonomy includes the freedom to hire staff (including the principal), selection of relevant curriculum, budget collaboration, scheduling collaboration, governance collaboration, and collaboration on many operational issues.

With these autonomies and the perseverance of our entire staff, LIBRA *Academy* has grown into a physically small but incredibly valuable place of learning that serves as a model of what the students in Huntington Park can achieve. Our high API (812) and attendance rates (96%) speak for themselves. They show that our students want to be here, and they want to succeed because they know we care and they know we can help them grow academically and socially.

**Welcome to LIBRA *Academy*...**

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the spring of 2010, LIBRA *Academy* completed its first year of implementation as the sole LAUSD pilot school in Local District 6. Our pilot school proposal was submitted to the INNOVATION and CHARTER SCHOOLS DIVISION in the fall of 2009. The site visit was conducted by the steering committee, followed by recommendations to our proposal and program for continued improvement. LIBRA was successfully granted pilot school status in September 2010 as we entered our second year of operation.

It is the intent of the stakeholders of LIBRA *Academy* and the leadership of Local District 6 that LIBRA *Academy* pilot school applies for relocation to the new *South Region High School #7 Complex* in the fall of 2012 as one of the three occupants. As LIBRA *Academy* has now entered its third successful year of operation, we have diligently and earnestly addressed the steering committee's feedback and recommendations issued after the site visit. These specific recommendations serve as our guide in requesting occupancy at SRHS#7 under the *Public School Choice 3.0* process.

Currently, LIBRA *Academy* pilot school is home to 335 students, grades 9-11. Our school occupies 16 classrooms and one multipurpose office on the northeast corner of the Huntington Park HS campus. LIBRA classrooms are exclusively comprised of portable classroom bungalows (rooms 90A-Q). There are no set-aside rooms, assembly areas, or learning center facilities. The area includes one J-building bathroom for students and faculty. All other facilities such as physical education, health, library, cafeteria, and auditorium, and locker rooms are shared with the Huntington Park HS campus. The Huntington Park/Bell Community Adult School office and HP staff parking lot are adjacent to the LIBRA office bungalow. The Adult School utilizes all LIBRA classrooms in the evening.

The entire LIBRA *Academy* area measures less than 100 yards; the facility is extremely congested with a few narrow ingress and egresses as safe walkways for students. By next year, 2012-13, our fourth year of operation inclusive of grades 9-12, LIBRA will exceed its classroom capacity for housing the recommended 400-500 students as a pilot school. Our academy would be forced to encroach on additional real estate on the main campus of Huntington Park HS stakeholders, defeating the purpose of small schools and personalization.



## A. SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Provide an analysis of the academic achievement and culture of the proposed PSC school.

### I. Mission and Vision

*“High schools are respected, even cherished, institutions in American life. But the vast majority of the nation’s high schools were designed for another time, and today they are far out of sync with the demands of our diverse republic and a global economy. Our high schools are obsolete. A national system of new small high schools requires the creation of many new high schools and a” choice” system that permits students to select their schools and thus encourages schools to be different in interesting and meaningful ways” (Vander Ark, 2003).*

#### VISION

LIBRA *Academy* promotes academic excellence, social responsibility and self-awareness in all students. LIBRA *Academy* implements a rigorous academic and advisement program that ignites our students’ curiosity to explore college and career options while challenging them to utilize the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills of adaptability, collaboration and critical thinking to become productive global citizens.

#### MISSION

LIBRA *Academy*’s mission addresses the multiple facets of the whole child by providing a relevant, rigorous, standards-based curriculum that is personalized to meet the diverse academic and social needs of our students. The activities and content in our advisory program assists our students in developing their character, emotional intelligence, and inter-personal skills so they will be prepared to become responsible, productive, and ethical citizens. To ensure students have equitable access to a rigorous A-G program we are committed to providing a data-driven enrichment and intervention program tailored to meet their individual learning needs. LIBRA *Academy* embraces our parents and community members as active partners in fulfilling our vision for the students of our community.

#### CORE BELIEFS

LIBRA *Academy* believes that all students deserve the right to participate in a quality educational program that is safe, welcoming, and assists all students in reaching their highest levels of academic achievement. To that end, LIBRA *Academy* educators promote:

- **Quality education:** We believe that students learn best when instruction is individualized and made relevant to their learning styles and interests.
- **High expectations:** We hold our students and ourselves accountable to high academic and behavioral standards.
- **Attending to the whole child:** We acknowledge that learning is not just academics but includes the social and emotional well-being of the child.
- **Creating a community of learners:** We embrace learning, problem-solving and reflection through collaboration and interdependence and model these behaviors with students.

LIBRA envisions its graduates emerging from high school with a love of learning, as well as a comprehensive body of knowledge as reflected in the A-G course selections. Our students gain the essential skills of effective communication, critical analysis, collaboration, and innovation that will help them build a life that is aligned with what they are passionate about and one that offers them satisfying and viable options in the complex and changing 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. The stakeholders of LIBRA *Academy* maximize our students' potential to become well-rounded individuals and productive citizens.

In order to help our students achieve academic excellence and personal responsibility, LIBRA designs and implements a viable curriculum that is culturally relevant, standards-based, and supports students in their mastery of the essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of adaptability, collaboration, and critical-thinking. Although many schools began restructuring themselves into thematic-based small learning communities (visual/performing arts) or career academies (health/human services), the design team of LIBRA *Academy* truly believes in offering our students a more global, liberal arts-based program that intentionally avoids the narrow focus of a particular theme or career. The team believes that, as new innovations change the business, social, and technological landscape of our world, versatility and curiosity will be our students' most valuable attributes. In our experience, we found that students entering high school at age 14 are better suited to explore and investigate a wide range of college and career options to make informed decisions about their future goals, rather than be restricted to a specific career pathway. Our autonomy as a pilot school affords us the flexibility to choose and design course offerings and content that help our students discover what they love and develop the skills they will need in order to succeed in any college or career they choose.

LIBRA *Academy* incorporates the *Scales of Justice* as our logo, representing a balance of character, mind, and well-being. We intentionally incorporate these "habits of mind" as concepts that thread into our Advisory lessons, and throughout our curriculum. We demonstrate a unity of purpose by supporting each student's growth toward self-understanding and fulfillment of his/her individual goals. LIBRA graduates will be equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and "habits of mind" that will allow them to become productive, contributing members of society who can make wise decisions and can set life goals with the utmost confidence. These tenets make the educational experience at LIBRA *Academy* distinct in this urban community of year round, comprehensive schools with student populations of 3500 or more. Our track record of success at LIBRA over the past two years, as reflected in our jump in API from 726 to 812 is validation that we have provided the community of Huntington Park a viable and innovative option for their children's education. Our attention to every aspect of the whole child is how we brand ourselves.

## **2. School Data Analysis.**

Provide an objective, critical analysis of the data by describing the major strengths and opportunities for improvement at the school. Analyze scores across subjects, grade levels, and student subgroups. Where are the gaps in achievement? Briefly outline your top priorities and necessary action steps.

### **Major Strengths**

In 2010 LIBRA *Academy* scored a 726 API mostly due to a 57% proficiency rate on the English-Language Arts CST and a 10% retention rate for the inaugural ninth grade class. Since then, LIBRA has increased its overall API with a score of 812 in 2011 by constantly reviewing data and implementing appropriate academic and behavioral interventions.

High scores in both World History and Biology largely contributed to this overall improvement. In Biology, 57% of LIBRA students demonstrated proficiency, and 60% demonstrated proficiency in History. Teachers of both subjects focused on hands-on labs and projects as well as explicit vocabulary instruction to maximize student learning.

A considerable increase in Math scores also helped generate the higher API score. Proficiency in Math went from 13% in 2010 to 29% in 2011. Math teachers credit the implementation of a Math Lab to supplement Algebra 1 for low performing students.

Despite a minor dip in performance in the English-Language Arts CST in 2011, the English program has developed a promising intervention program to target students designated as Below Basic or Far Below Basic on the CST. In the ninth grade this resulted in a higher proficiency (57%) and lower numbers of students designated as Below Basic or Far Below Basic (12%). In the tenth grade, in-school and intersession interventions resulted in 84% of sophomores passing the CAHSEE on their first try.

In 2011-2012 LIBRA continues to develop hands on labs, interdisciplinary projects, and intervention classes to improve both student learning and student performance.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

Despite the overall improvement, LIBRA *Academy* faculty and staff have identified several areas for growth, including instruction for English learners (EL) and students with disabilities (SWD).

At LIBRA *Academy*, English Learners (ELs) represent 51% of the student population, which means that their performance indicates how well the school will perform overall. Only 35% of EL students demonstrated proficiency in English in 2011 compared to 54% proficiency for all students. To address this achievement gap, the English department has developed an in-school intervention class to specifically target low-performing ninth grade EL students. The teacher currently uses High Point texts and web 2.0 tools to supplement the ninth grade curriculum and improve student performances. High Point texts provide high-interest stories and articles with visual cues and other scaffolds for ELs. Web 2.0 tools include online storyboarding tools that enable struggling readers to

create their own visuals quickly using laptops. Both of these serve to engage ELs much more than in previous years, and they provide more incentives to read and understand what they read.

Although students with disabilities (SWDs) do not represent a large portion of the school, next year LIBRA *Academy* expects to have more students with disabilities. In the 2010-2011 school year, LIBRA had four students with disabilities, and in the 2011-2012 school year, we have only six. In other words, even though our numbers show 25% proficiency for students with disabilities, the number can easily plummet without appropriate interventions when the number of SWDs grows next year. Faculty and staff members have made a concerted effort to attract more students with disabilities to reflect the Huntington Park community by demonstrating consistent growth with our current students with disabilities. To address their needs, SWDs will remain in general education classrooms, but faculty members have and will continue to attend professional development workshops to address the specific needs of students with IEPs and discuss best practices for this population, including SDAIE and other strategies that allow students to learn through different modalities.

Finally, LIBRA *Academy* staff decided to focus on reading and writing across the curriculum to further engage students in all content. To write across the curriculum, we developed a universal rubric based on the *Six-Traits of Writing* rubric. As our next step we will implement common writing standards by using them to create and score common formative assessments (CFA). The CFAs will then provide data for skills to target during class or intervention sessions.

**3. Applicant Team Analysis:** Provide evidence of the team's ability to successfully manage the academic operations of the school.

The entire staff of LIBRA *Academy* beginning with the original Design Team and Administrator, to the additional 12 teachers who have been invited to join the team over the past two years, is a group of highly qualified professionals who bring a vast array of experiences and knowledge that make our team well suited to meet the needs of the student population in the community of Huntington Park.

Beginning with the original 6 teachers and principal of LIBRA *Academy* during its first year of implementation in 2008-09, each team member brought anywhere from 3 to 22 years of teaching and administrative experience combined, each serving Local District 6 and Huntington Park HS exclusively. Two of the Design Team members are National Board Certified; three teachers are graduates of South Gate HS and Huntington Park HS respectively. The principal of LIBRA *Academy* taught Language Arts at Huntington Park HS for 13 years before serving as HPHS' School Improvement Coordinator, Small Learning Communities Facilitator, and finally Assistant Principal exclusively at Huntington Park HS. Our Office Technician, also a graduate of Huntington Park HS, spent her entire 22-year career at HPHS, before joining LIBRA *Academy* last year. Currently, two of our staff members (ELA/Math) have commenced the National Board Certification process. One senior member of the ELA department has taught Advanced Placement English Language for over 17 years.

As our staff has grown to a 16-member faculty in 2011; our 14 teachers and counselor have between 4-22 years in their respective content areas, all proudly serving Los Angeles Unified School District their entire careers. Every faculty member has taught in LAUSD districts 5 or 6, with

similar demographics. Every LIBRA staff member has taught in large, comprehensive year-round schools, and understands first hand, the challenges that face our students in urban, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods. We have all chosen to join LIBRA *Academy* to make a difference in the community we have served for a quarter of a century collectively. Our current student achievement data (API/attendance) is confirmation and validation to our staff that we are well suited to meet the needs of the students in this community.

## Qualifications

### **Castro, Jeannette – Math**

- Clear Single Subject Teaching Credential in Foundational Level Mathematics
- Four years teaching Mathematics at Huntington Park High School and LIBRA Academy
- Leadership Coordinator at LIBRA Academy
- Project GEAR UP Roosevelt High School Program Assistant

### **Davis, Lisa – Principal**

- 13 years teaching experience, ELA/ESL
- Department Chairperson, ELL, Huntington Park HS
- School Improvement Coordinator, HPHS 5 years
- II/USP Budget and Program Coordinator, HPHS
- Small Learning Community Facilitator, 3 years, HPHS
- SLC Federal Grant author, HPHS (\$1million)
- Assistant Principal, Professional Development and Budget 2years, HPHS
- WASC Self-Study Coordinator, HPHS
- Assistant Principal, Bell HS LD6
- Assistant Principal, Elizabeth Learning Center SPAN School LD6

### **Di Pieri, Kasandra – Chemistry Teacher**

- 10 years teaching overall and 7 years teaching science as a single subject
- Taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade (multiple subject), 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade science, and 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> grade science
- Taught at Utah St. Elementary School, Southeast Middle School, and Libra Academy
- Clear Multiple Subject Credential and Clear Single Subject Credential in Geo-Science (Earth Science and Astronomy) and Chemistry
- Over 50% of Inter-coordinated Science students scored proficient or better on the CST
- Extensive background in the use the arts as a vehicle to teach science concepts

### **Diaz, Jose – English-Language Arts**

- Single-Subject Clear Credential in English-Language Arts
- 5 years of teaching experience at Redondo Union High School, Bell High School, and LIBRA Academy
- Governing Board Member at LIBRA Academy
- Enrichment and Intervention Team Member
- English-Language Arts PLC Lead and Journalism Club Advisor

### **Dolhi, Sue – Social Studies**

- Social Science Teacher
- Single-Subject Clear Credential in Social Science, CLAD
- National Board Certified in Adolescent and Young Adult Social Science

- Masters Degree in Educational Leadership
- Co-Founder of LIBRA Academy
- BTSA Support Provider for New Teachers entering the Teaching Profession

**Garibay, Adrian – Inter-Coordinated Science and Biology Teacher**

- 4 years teaching science: Biology, Chemistry, Physiology, and ICS
- Credential in Biology and Chemistry
- 57% of last year's Biology students received a proficient or advanced in the CST

**Jones, Jeffrey – English Language Arts**

- B.A. English Literature and Composition and Single-Subject Secondary Credential
- College Board Certification in AP English Language and AP English Literature
- 15 years of Advanced Placement teaching experience
- Online college Board Lesson Plan Evaluator
- ELA department Chair 2004-2009 at Bell High School
- Created "Writing Across the Curriculum" program

**Lambert, Shannon – Social Studies**

- 14 years teaching at Huntington Park High School and LIBRA Academy
- B.A. Sociology
- Professional Clear Credential Single Subject in Social Science
- National Board Certification in Adolescence and Young Adult/Social Studies-History
- Master of Arts in Teaching Specialization Teacher Leadership National University
- CLAD Certificate
- High school/ Junior college Women's soccer coach 98-08
- Co-founder LIBRA Academy 2008

**Pham, My Chi – Math**

- Single-Subject Clear Credential in Mathematics
- 7 years teaching experience
- Masters in education, administration
- Elizabeth Learning Center math department chair, Learning Team facilitator
- Students' CST scores increased steadily at Elizabeth Learning Center

**Ring, Tom – Math**

- California Single Subject Teaching Credential in Mathematics
- National Board Certification, Mathematics, Adolescence and Young Adulthood
- California Bilingual Certificate of Competence: Spanish
- Advanced Placement Statistic and Calculus for 10 years
- 20 years of teaching experience at Wilson High School, Roosevelt High School, and Malalaua High School, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea

**Rodriguez, Orlando – Math**

- 10 years teaching at Huntington Park High School and 1 year at LIBRA Academy
- Clear Single Subject Teaching Credential in Math
- Advanced Placement Calculus AB Experience
- Bilingual/Bicultural



*"We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee."*  
(Marian Wright Edelman)

For the past 2½ years, LIBRA *Academy* in Huntington Park has been living proof of what it takes to be part of a turnaround school (HPHS) and also become its own new school environment. Each of our team members brings a plethora of teaching and personal experiences that have helped LIBRA *Academy* successfully implement its plan. We believe in our mission and vision for what a quality school can provide our students; yet, we remain realists in accepting that this work is challenging, given limited resources and bureaucratic constraints. We possess the collective will as educators and believers in our earned autonomy, to continue to strive to reach our potential in helping our students reach academic excellence. We hold ourselves accountable and grounded each day by reflecting and questioning: "When is good, good enough?" "How many non-graduates is an acceptable number?" It is this inquietude with the status quo that makes our staff well-positioned to continue to do this honorable work one child at a time.

### **Implementation Plan**

In its first year of implementation, LIBRA *Academy* operated with partial autonomies in the areas of budget, staffing, governance, calendar, and curriculum. We expect to implement full pilot school autonomies by the end of year three, 2012. We are committed to the five to six year time frame needed to achieve the full scope of our proposed vision. Each year we will see additional staff and course offerings.

#### **Year One 2009-2010**

- Used a modified block schedule, consisting of a combination of 90 minute and 60 minute blocks
- Used Go! curriculum in 9<sup>th</sup> grade Advisory class
- Developed weekly teacher professional development sessions (see Attachment II)
- Offered rigorous A-G course selections: Math, English, World Cultures, PE & Health, Inter-coordinated Science, Education Career Planning elective
- Individualized counseling services with graduation planning offered in addition to the support coming through advisory
- Provided career and college exploration for all students through elective course
- Prepared students for dual enrollment and internship options in future years
- Focused on teacher professional development and planning time
- Incorporated key critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration skills across all classes
- Targeted fail rates/at-risk students in ELA and Math for pull out intervention session for assistance
- Contracted content teachers for the targeted students
- Planned for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade course sequence/offering
- Hired "2<sup>nd</sup> Team" of teachers to expand LIBRA to two grade levels

#### **Year Two 2010-2011**

- Established shared leadership sub-committees: Intervention Team/Advisory Teams/Technology Team/Content-specific Professional Learning Communities(PLC)
- Developed Advisory Course inclusive of 9/10 grades
- Hosted parent meeting venue monthly: “Coffee with the Principal” meetings
- Established community partnership with Huntington Park Community Woman’s Club
- Conducted staff Summer Retreats/Professional development/content planning days
- Conducted professional development on identifying, defining, applying school-wide instructional strategies

#### Year Three 2011-12

- Established service learning projects criteria and community service for college application resumes
- Enhanced readiness for college through individual counseling
- Established Governing Board
- Adopted partially allocated Per pupil Budget model
- Focused on embedding cross-curricular expository writing skills
- Coordinated RTI training and included RTI planning
- Established Parenting Workshop and Planned Parenthood partnership
- Offered Advanced Placement courses in math, English, and Foreign Language
- Continued refinement of data analysis and curriculum/instruction
- Revised A-G course matrix to reflect mission/vision and increased pilot school autonomy for graduation requirements
- Designed Tier 3 Intensive Intervention plan for mentoring severely at-risk students
- Re-designed Advisory with mission/vision and inclusive of grades 9-11
- Submitted application for WASC Expanded Substantive Change Visit and WASC candidacy

#### Year Four 2012-13

- Organize student exhibitions of content proficiency and demonstrations of habits of mind
- Establish business partners for internship placement and service learning
- Relocate to new campus: SRHS #7
- Begin initial WASC process/Self-Study
- Develop and coordinate student internship placement
- Establish college partnership for dual enrollment opportunities
- Offer online courses
- Design authentic projects to promote project-based learning
- Graduate first cohort of LIBRA students, Class of 2013

#### Year Five 2013-14

- Design student performance portfolios to exhibit 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of adaptability, collaboration and critical thinking to become productive global citizens
- Increase Advanced Placement offerings to enhance students’ readiness for college
- Analyze elective course offerings to determine interest and alignment to mission/vision
- Continue student achievement data analysis to guide continued program improvement

**INFORMATIONAL SUMMARY. Attached in appendix**

#### **B. INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

## Category One: Unwavering Focus on Academic Achievement

### B-1. Curriculum and Instruction

- a. **Instructional Program:** Provide a thorough description of the proposed instructional framework and the underlying theory that drives it.

*"After more than 30 years of research on schools and classrooms, a science of education has begun to emerge. Although there is no silver bullet that guarantees that every student will be successful, now more than ever research provides guidance about the characteristics of effective schools and effective teachers that, if followed, can help maximize school and ultimately student performance" (November 2003; School, Teacher, and Leadership Impacts on Student Achievement; Kirsten Miller)*

### ***The Importance of Effective Teaching***

*"Numerous studies reveal the tremendous impact schools and teachers can have on student achievement. For example, a study conducted by Sanders and Horn (1994, reviewed in Marzano, 2003) reveals a 39 percentage-point difference in student achievement between students with "most effective" and "least effective" teachers. In classrooms headed by teachers characterized as "most effective," students posted achievement gains of 53 percentage points over the course of one academic year, whereas in classrooms led by "least effective" teachers, student achievement gains averaged 14 percentage points" (Marzano, 2003).*

One mark of an effective teacher is the ability to use an array of research-based instructional strategies. McREL's meta-analysis of the research on instruction (Marzano, 1998) identifies the following nine instructional strategies that enhance student achievement. The teaching team at LIBRA Academy is committed to utilizing and sharing best instructional practice as part of our goal at providing "good first teaching." Our teaching team embeds and continuously refines the following proven instructional practices:

- *Identifying* similarities and differences: The classroom practices associated with the instructional category of identifying similarities and differences include comparison tasks, classifying tasks, the use of metaphors, and the use of analogies.
- *Summarizing* and note taking: Summarizing and note taking focus on distilling and analyzing information, thus strengthening students' understanding of the content.
- *Reinforcing* effort and providing recognition: By reinforcing effort and providing recognition, teachers underscore that students' efforts make a difference in their levels of achievement.
- *Homework* and practice: Homework and practice provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding and strengthen their skills.
- *Nonlinguistic* representations: Nonlinguistic representations can take a variety of forms including graphic representations, physical models, mental pictures, drawings, and kinesthetic classroom activities.
- *Cooperative* learning: There are five defining elements of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group processing.

- *Setting goals* and providing feedback: Goal setting establishes a direction for learning. Involving students in the goal-setting process can increase students' accountability for their own learning.
- *Generating* and testing hypotheses: Processes that encourage students to generate and test hypotheses include systems analysis, invention, experimental inquiry, decision making, and problem solving.
- *Activating* prior knowledge: Cues, questions, and advance organizers give students a preview of what they are about to learn or experience and thus help activate students' prior knowledge.

By integrating these strategies into their classroom practice, teachers can help students deepen their understanding and strengthen their proficiency (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Students at LIBRA *Academy* are regularly and consistently exposed to higher-level inquiry skills, writing across the curriculum, collaboration, reading in all content areas, and the means to develop strong presentation skills that are necessary to communicate effectively in a global society. To assist our students in succeeding in a challenging A-G curriculum, we focus on building strong foundational skills in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade by “teaching” students how to use meta-cognitive skills such as: Cornell note-taking, annotating the text, reading apprenticeship, guided reading/writing, reflective journals, and discussion techniques.

In addition, all LIBRA *Academy* students will be college-prepared and career-ready because we design and implement instructional strategies that are researched-based and implemented consistently, thus providing maximum learning opportunities for our all of students. Teachers collaborate to plan strategies, map curriculum, and decide on appropriate differentiation and intervention for diverse learners of *all abilities*. Teachers utilize instructional strategies such as Socratic seminars, literature circles, and reciprocal teaching while also using of graphic organizers such as thinking maps to scaffold content.

A central focus in the LIBRA classroom is student motivation, academic engagement, and academic growth. LIBRA's charge is two-fold: we personalize learning for all students while assisting them in reaching high expectations for achievement by providing them with the meta-cognitive tools necessary to acquire content knowledge. We believe strongly in setting high goals for our students' achievement while providing the necessary support to reach these goals. Our instruction is designed to promote student-centered activities, utilize teacher as facilitator, and foster respect and encouragement for multiple solutions to problems.

LIBRA *Academy* embraces the fact that the ability to communicate effectively is an essential skill; students who read and write well and build confidence as speakers and thoughtful listeners are armed with the essential skills they need to compete and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. Therefore, LIBRA integrates the four domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) *intentionally* throughout all content areas, providing students with ample practice at building proficiency.

Embedded in all content areas, students at LIBRA will participate in:

- Close readings
- Discussions, examinations, and interpretations of texts
- Use the writing process for multiple purposes
- Engage in research and individual inquiry to locate, analyze, and evaluate information
- Develop grade-level, appropriate academic vocabulary

In order to provide our students with every opportunity available to develop their language proficiency, teachers at LIBRA provide students with strategic, researched-based instruction that promotes content literacy in all subjects. In order to help student become literate in all content areas, our LIBRA teachers in all content areas use such instructional strategies as:

- Think~ alouds
- Guided/shared reading
- Reciprocal teaching and questioning
- Interacting with the text

Our teachers collaborate during professional development sessions to engage in conversations and planning around using appropriate scaffolding strategies to meet the needs of our diverse learners and ensure that we use our instructional autonomy to design classroom environments that assist in building confidence, develop meta-cognitive strategies, and enhance learning. As we continue to refine our instruction, teachers at LIBRA explore ways to embed expository writing and reading practices in all subjects, to assist students in becoming competent and confident in all subjects. Our ultimate goal at LIBRA in developing academically engaged readers and writers is to create student-centered classrooms where our students are encouraged and motivated to take risks with language, complex ideas, and express themselves in a safe environment, interact and discuss various types to texts, and feel their personal interests and experiences are valued.

At LIBRA *Academy*, we have already begun the dialogue and journey in shifting from practices that focus on high school completion, to focusing on college and career readiness for all students, as this shift is immanent with the adoption of the Common Core Standards (College Board/NASSP). Our staff has already begun initial analysis of the features of the common core standards in ELA/Math and understanding how our instruction must change in order to develop the cross-content literacy and mathematical reasoning expected of our students as measured with the new assessments and performance tasks. We have already allocated professional development sessions in the spring of this year to address the following recommended aspects of the new standards:

- ✚ Content alignment: How will we align the common core standards to content knowledge and skills?
- ✚ Rigor: To what degree are our current standards/assessments at the same level of rigor as common core?
- ✚ Progression: Is there alignment of content and skills at the same grade-levels?

### **Eliminating the Race Achievement Gap**

LIBRA *Academy* offers our students a culturally relevant, responsive and rigorous curriculum (CRRE) that reflects our core belief that all students can flourish if they are provided with accessible opportunities to learn in settings that are accepting, affirming, and authentic. Our staff at LIBRA uses research-based pedagogy to ensure all students are engaged in high-level thinking opportunities. This commitment to equity and access of the curriculum for all our students has been evident since implementing the following strategies:

- Teachers are mindful of the quality indicators for *Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education* (CRRE/AEMP, LAUSD) such as: adjusting the instruction to meet the

needs and experiences of diverse students using their cultural knowledge, prior experience, and performance styles;

- A commitment to maintain heterogeneous classes and access to honors curriculum for all students;
- Utilizing key instructional strategies adopted from *The California International Studies Project* (CISP) in the following areas: multiple ability instruction/setting expectations/holding students accountable/engaging students/sharing authority/developing critical thinkers;
- Professional development for teachers to support them in differentiated instruction and in maintaining high standards and support for diverse learners;
- Using appropriate strategies to enhance ELL learning: scaffolding, chunking, vocabulary development, graphic organizers.

Below is an example of the strategies our teachers utilize to ensure all students have equal access to high level learning opportunities in the areas of shared authority and expectations:

#### *Shared Authority:*

LIBRA teachers implement the concepts of intellectual authority and curiosity that develops responsibility in students to share this authority as they complete assignments, solve problems, and present ideas. Students will demonstrate collaboration and communication skills that build confidence and empower them to become instructors and shape their own learning (Equity & Access).

#### *Setting Expectations:*

LIBRA teachers show students how to internalize high expectations and be held accountable to manage themselves and exhibit standards of behavior toward peers that enhance rich, academic discussions, build trusting relationships, encourage analytic thinking with the conviction that weak effort is unacceptable and there are a variety of creative paths to excellence (Equity & Access).

#### *Multiple Ability Instruction:*

LIBRA teachers build a caring, mutually respectful classroom environment. They will provide students with multiple opportunities to use academic language and build students' repertoires of skills and experiences that support that support academic success, guaranteeing that "higher-status" students do not dominate the discussions (*Equity & Access, California International Studies Project*).

### **Differentiated Instruction**

LIBRA's commitment to personalization includes meaningful differentiated instruction. We recognize that we must adjust what we teach, how we teach, and how we assess to fully access our students' potential.

We believe that students must be able to access the content, so we modify the methods and materials we use to teach. Materials on the industrial revolution in a history class may include video clips, textbook readings, political cartoons and era-specific music. This honors our students with different learning preferences.

We teach content by turning the objectives in the state standards into a series of incremental steps, which make it easier to identify at which step a learner can access the content. By creating an explicit series of steps to achieve specific goals, students and teachers know what they have already



accomplished as well as what they will need to accomplish to continue developing toward the ultimate goal of proficiency and above. In other words, a student will already know that if she can write a strong thesis, the next step is to be able to find and explain evidence that supports the thesis. Although these are incremental steps, they ultimately lead to the same objective of writing a persuasive text.

We focus on *essential questions* and concepts to ensure all students have a fundamental understanding of the content, but we vary complexity of the content to meet the needs of diverse learners. As we plan our curriculum, we focus on what the students must learn to master the content, but we also develop supplemental materials for students who can delve deeper into the content. For example, Biology students may demonstrate understanding of DNA and RNA, so they can now examine enrichment supplemental material showing how the same concept is used for cloning.

We adjust our classroom management strategies to meet the needs of students, so we do not have fixed seating. We vary grouping methods to work on specific skills and to emphasize individual strengths. Teachers at LIBRA *Academy* use pair-sharing, Socratic circles, project quads, and work stations to organize students depending on the assigned activity or task. By varying grouping, students and teachers can shift their focus on different tasks, and the intentional grouping provides students with the opportunity to showcase or share strengths with other students.

We believe that students should have various ways to demonstrate growth. We constantly use a multitude of formal and informal assessments to gauge student progress and determine which scaffolds and materials work best for different groups of students. Teachers recognize that students can show understanding through graphic organizers, artistic expression, creative writing, presentation, theatrical performance, multimedia, and discussion. Therefore, we constantly search for and develop new methods of assessment that allow our students to shine and demonstrate competency.

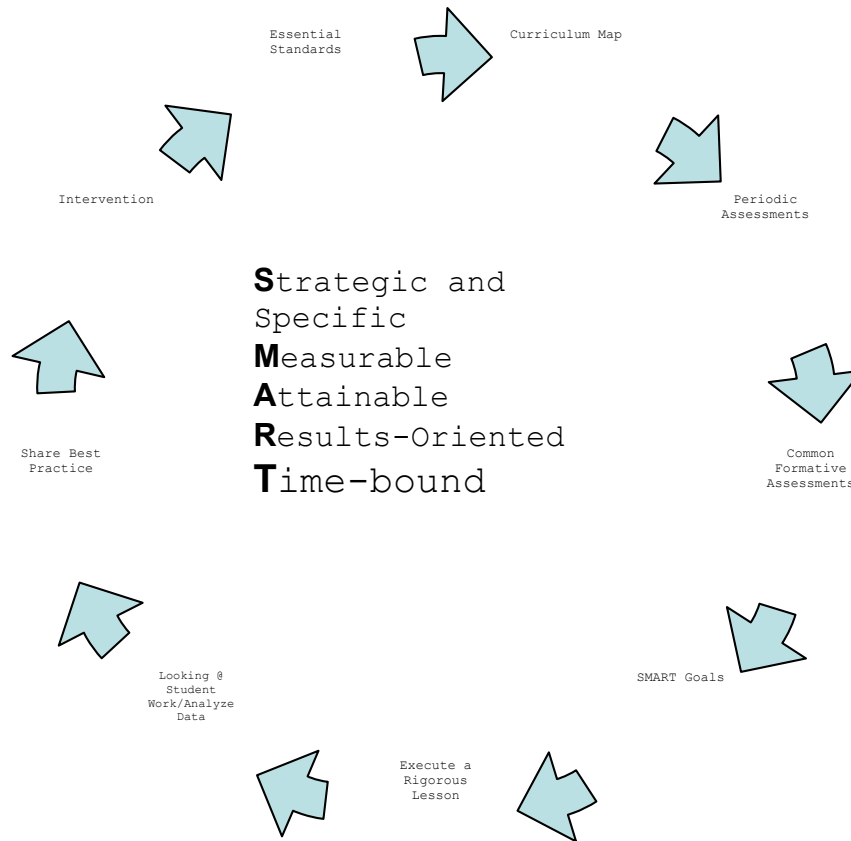
Finally, we strive to make each task relevant and challenging for all students to make them active contributors to the content. We honor our students by constantly reviewing the tasks we assign individually and in PLC's (Professional Learning Communities) to ensure that they meet their intended objectives. If they do not, we develop new tasks collectively that will better engage our students while challenging them. For instance, if the majority of students do not complete a vocabulary assignment, the teacher must either develop a new assignment or redesign it to maximize engagement because we recognize that giving an assignment that does not engage students does not help students learn the content.

**b. Core Academic Curriculum:** Describe the core academic curriculum and how the proposed curriculum is evidence-based, culturally relevant, will meet the diverse learning needs of the student population it will serve, and addresses the California State Standards.

*“The real path to greatness, as it turns out, requires simplicity and diligence. It requires clarity, not instant illumination. It demands each of us to focus on what is vital-and to eliminate all of the extraneous distractions.” (Collins, 2001)*

The instructional philosophy of LIBRA *Academy* emphasizes our belief that all students can succeed in a rigorous, standards-based curriculum if they are provided with the necessary tools to facilitate their learning. To this end, LIBRA has aligned its curriculum and instruction around the concepts emphasized by Mike Schmoker in Focus: Elevating the Essentials (ASCD 2011): *simplicity, clarity, and priority* when organizing and planning *how we teach, what we teach, and authentic literacy* across the curriculum (Schmoker, 2011). LIBRA utilizes its instructional autonomy by designing a curriculum that not only meets the challenging A-G requirements, but also encourages students to use their content knowledge to explore their special interests, creative abilities, and unique talents. Students are able to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways such as through authentic performance-based assessments, exhibitions, reflective portfolios and project-based learning that encourage and inspire students to demonstrate their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills by exploring real-world problems and challenges.

Over the past 2 ½ years, teachers at LIBRA *Academy* have demonstrated their unwavering attention and focus on the academic achievement of our students by framing their curricular decisions around the belief that the content of what they choose to teach must not only be standards-based, but must also meet the test of endurance, leverage, and readiness for the next level (Ainsworth, Power Standards, 2003). In other words, LIBRA *Academy* teachers design their *guaranteed viable curriculum* to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to learn essential skills as determined in their content standards, increasing the likelihood they will be successful in their college and career experiences. Teachers at LIBRA engage in professional learning community dialogue “to not only decide together what students should be able to do, they also decide what not to teach” (PLC at Work, 2007). As a result, LIBRA content departments (PLCs) engage in a continuous cycle of improvement as demonstrated in the following graphic organizer:



As part of their curriculum planning, LIBRA teachers ensure that their established curriculum is clearly aligned to the content standards, including benchmarks that are measurable, rigorous, and relevant, and that their content is aligned from grade to grade. Accordingly, as our teachers engage in this improvement cycle, they are continuously dialoguing about best practices and making decisions around the overarching PLC tenets:

- ✚ *What do we expect students to learn?*
- ✚ *How do we guarantee that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum?*
- ✚ *How will we know if they've learned it?*
- ✚ *How will we respond when they do/don't learn it?*

### English Department PLC Cycle

The entire faculty acknowledges that language skills serve as a major indicator of academic success in all content areas. Therefore, in order to develop cohesiveness and common expectations, the English PLC decided to focus on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade California State standards as an area of study. Because the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade standards are the same, the English department has been able to allow each teacher to focus on his or her grade of expertise while collaborating to develop common assessments. In other words, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher collaborates with the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teachers because he also teaches a 10<sup>th</sup> grade class.

As a result of the collaboration, the English teachers have used assessments to identify student needs, discuss best practices, and design appropriate interventions to ensure that all students can demonstrate language proficiency. More specifically, the department uses a short writing diagnostic for initial assessment at the beginning of the year, formal and informal formative assessments, district periodic assessments, and summative assessments during the year, and a portfolio along with the CST at the end of the year to demonstrate student progress and identify individual and overall needs.

The larger goal is to align the content and skills of the class to better prepare students, not only to pass the CAHSEE exam, but also to succeed in the AP, EAP, EPT, and other college entrance exams, which have much more rigorous writing and analytical demands. Furthermore, the department has taken on the responsibility to establish school-wide writing expectations and to provide support and resources for creating and assessing writing across the curriculum.

#### History Department PLC cycle

The Social Science curriculum draws heavily on History Alive!, interactive instructional strategies, cooperative interaction, spiraling questioning and skill builders that utilize the Multiple Intelligences approach to teaching. The teachers create unit/lesson plans that are based on the CA State standards and emphasize the Essential Standards that are covered on the CST standardized tests. Students become familiar with Essential Questions and Common Formative Assessments are developed collaboratively based on the standards and implemented every week to determine proficiency levels of students. Outcomes of assessments inform the modification of curriculum and activities that students engage in. The PLC discussions lead to “shared understanding of student performance and helps us move past the (“ I’m teaching it but they’re not getting it”) and allows us to come to a shared understanding of the skills or knowledge around which our students need the most support” (Boudett, 2005).

#### Math Department PLC cycle

The Professional Learning Communities in the math department are organized by course and are focused on two objectives: planning instruction and implementing a tier 2 intervention program for struggling students. First we plan a standards based curricular map for each course that prepares students for the district’s periodic assessments and California Standards Tests in May. After the initial curricular map is in place, PLC members work together to modify each course curriculum map so that it adapts to our student’s needs. During our weekly meetings, common formative and summative assessment data are analyzed and used to monitor student progress and inform modifications to the instructional plan.

In addition to monitoring student progress, common formative assessments as well as grades and test scores are used to identify struggling students who may need additional, tier 2, intervention. These students are placed in an intervention class held during the school day, on Wednesday and Thursday, for 45 minutes. In this class, students receive additional instruction and tutoring with the concepts they are not mastering within their math class.

Science Department PLC cycle
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Inter-Coordinated Science and Biology - The focus is to teach the science of life or living matter in all its forms and phenomena, especially with reference to origin, growth, reproduction, structure, and behavior. The focus is also to motivate students to understand that science will always be part of their lives. In addition, as 21<sup>st</sup> century learner, the student must understand that society is depending on science to solve earth's problems and careers will be available to them in the future.

Chemistry This course is designed to give the student an in-depth look at chemistry while enhancing their critical thinking skills, and preparing them for the California Standardized Test in Chemistry. Visual, kinesthetic, and math activities are included in every unit to address and meet the needs of the different types of learners in this class, and to make the content relevant, fun, and accessible. The ultimate goal for students in Chemistry is that they not only learn successfully the material, but also have fun doing it, and be *inspired by science* to create works of art.

PLC Work - The Science Professional Learning Community at Libra *Academy* helps one another in designing bi-monthly Common Formative Assessments, reviewing student data for these assessments, and targeting students for re-teaching in Intervention classes. We also find commonalities with the content standards between each type of science and we embed these connections as we teach these standards to create a continuum that smoothly transitions from one grade level to the next. For example, if Chemistry had connections with Biology and Inter-Coordinated Science, we say, "You have learned the basics about this upcoming topic in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade science. On the other hand, if what is being taught in Biology or ICS is going to be taught more in depth in Chemistry the teacher would say "You are going to see this concept again in Chemistry in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade." We also give one another ideas for teaching in our classes and collaborate in common planning for future lessons.

**c. WASC & A-G Requirements:** Explain how the school will meet A-G requirements and outline the plan for WASC accreditation.

All students at LIBRA *Academy* have access to a rigorous A-G college preparatory course sequence as the foundation of their educational experience. We guarantee that our master schedule reflects the A-G requirements as we begin planning for its design each spring. Upon careful reflection and analysis of student data and collegial conversations with our highly qualified staff, LIBRA makes decisions to revise course sequences to better meet the needs of our students. One example of how we remain a student-centered school and effectively utilize our pilot school autonomy is in our approach to math. We re-sequenced our math courses to better address the learning needs of our students. LIBRA's math sequence is as follows:

- ✚ Algebra1
- ✚ Algebra2
- ✚ Geometry
- ✚ Trigonometry
- ✚ Advanced Placement Calculus
- ✚ Statistics

This sequence allows our students to receive two consecutive years of instruction in Algebra, providing consistency to both students and teachers for vertical planning and preparation.

We also aggregate our course offerings to include Advanced Placement courses in English, Spanish, Calculus and Statistics. We are exploring courses in AP Sciences and Social Studies in years four and five. It is always a challenge for a small school to provide a plethora of options in course offerings for students to explore; LIBRA staff embraces this challenge by critically analyzing and discussing what we can best offer students to support their educational needs and personal interests. LIBRA staff remains flexible in the number of course preparations they teach to best serve the needs of our students. We look vigorously for highly qualified teachers who are able to teach in various subject areas and levels within that subject, to assist in bringing variety to our students.

In accordance with the expectations of the Western Association of Colleges and Schools (WASC), LIBRA Academy is aware of the conditions of eligibility for accreditation under the Expanded Substantive Change Visit Procedure for small schools. We are preparing now to begin the *Focus on Learning* process. LIBRA *Academy* will focus on the following key issues that will impact our accreditation:

- a. the capacity of our school leadership
- b. commitment of faculty and staff
- c. understanding of the accreditation process and competence in meeting WASC standards
- d. successful design of an Action Plan

We embrace the accreditation process as a viable means to engage us in meaningful school-wide improvement. Below is an example of our current instructional program:



## MODEL OF LIBRA ACADEMY STUDENT'S SCHEDULE TO MEET GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

GRADE 9		GRADE 10		GRADE 11		GRADE 12	
FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
Life Skills	Health	*World History A	*World History B	*US History A	*US History B	*Principals of American Democracy	*Economics
English 9A	English 9B	*English 10A	*English 10B	*American Literature Composition	*Contemporary Composition	*Expository Composition	*English Literature
Algebra 1A or Algebra 2A	Algebra 1B or Algebra 2B	Geometry A or Algebra 2A or Trigonometry	Geometry B or Algebra 2B or Math Analysis	Trigonometry or *Calculus A or *Statistics A	*Math Analysis or Calculus B or Statistics B	(Continue in the math sequence) *	(Continue in the math sequence) *
Biology A or Int/Coor Science A	Biology B or Int/Coor Science B	Biology A or Chemistry A	Biology A or Chemistry A	Lab Science	(Lab Science)	(Lab Science)	(Lab Science)
Math Lab A or Geography A	Math Lab B or Geography B	Elective* (World Language)	Elective* (World Language)	Elective* (World Language)	Elective* (World Language)	Elective* (World Language)	Elective* (World Language)
Physical Education	Physical Education	Physical Education	Physical Education	Visual & Performing Arts	Visual & Performing Arts	Visual & Performing Arts	Visual & Performing Arts

\*Advanced Placement option available  
( ) Recommended courses

LIBRA *Academy* will enter its fourth year of implementation in September 2012, graduating its first class in June 2013. By December 31, 2011 the principal and Governing Board of LIBRA will begin the process for requesting both our CDS code and initial WASC affiliation, following the requirements as determined by the Accrediting Commission of Schools. Once the request for WASC affiliation is determined, and LIBRA is deemed eligible by the Accrediting Commission, we will complete the required Initial School Description report and an initial site visit will be scheduled in the spring of 2012. The on-site initial visit and commission report will determine whether or not LIBRA *Academy* will be granted Initial Accreditation, Candidacy for Accreditation, or denial of WASC affiliation. The principal of LIBRA *Academy* has served as both a WASC Self-Study coordinator and administrator overseeing the WASC Self-Study process and site visit at two

comprehensive LAUSD high schools. LIBRA *Academy* is confident in its ability to obtain Initial Accreditation status.

**d. Addressing the Needs of All Students:** Explain how the proposed instructional framework will reinforce a commitment to different methods of instruction to meet the needs of all students.

### ***Special Needs Students***

At LIBRA *Academy*, we believe that in order to meet the needs of our English Language Learners and Special Needs students, we must utilize effective, research-based learning strategies to guarantee these students have equal access to a rigorous A-G curriculum. We understand and acknowledge the fact our student population has become increasingly diverse and challenging each year. In order to adequately prepare all our students to master the rigors of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, our teachers implement the following basic theories, principles, and assessment strategies to effectively teach our ELL and Special Needs students:

- Build academic vocabulary into all lessons
- Use of realia, visual scaffolding, cooperative learning, leveled questions
- Build and activate background knowledge
- Extend opportunities for academic English interaction
- Provide both modeling and feedback related to language usage in both speech and writing
- Provide ample opportunities for students to participate in activities in the classroom that require active engagement
- Authentic Assessments
  - Observations of students in the process of accomplishing academic tasks
  - Assessments that are similar to or identical to tasks that students routinely accomplish
  - Portfolio assessments

For the past 2 ½ years, we have experimented and remained flexible in meeting the diverse learning needs of our students in the general classroom by implementing various supports and services. As a result, we employ the following strategies to meet all our students needs: we have utilized the co-planning and teaching model with special education itinerants and paraprofessional support; we develop student interaction skills and leadership by engaging students in peer support groups; we follow the modifications and accommodations as specified in the IEP; teachers differentiate and tier curriculum as necessary to meet individual student needs; providing the LRE (least restrictive environment) by fully including all students with disabilities, English language learners, and advanced learners.

We believe that all students can learn and have leadership skills that need to be accessed and exercised, and that all students have a part in completing our community. LIBRA *Academy* fully understands their responsibility in implementing and complying with all instructional, behavioral accommodations and modifications as specified in our students' IEP/504 Plans. We regularly engage in data analysis and review the progress of all our special needs students and adjust our program accordingly.

Over the past two years, LIBRA has implemented the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) for our special needs students, as determined by their IEPs. LIBRA's entire special education student

population has been comprised of students requiring a resource specialist program model. The teaching team at LIBRA felt that fully including our RSP students in the general population, while providing them the additional support as a “pull-in” co-teaching model with our RSP itinerant, provided the most conducive learning environment for our students. Collaboratively, the RSP itinerant and general education teachers in core subjects address our students’ needs by reviewing the accommodations/modifications in the IEP.

To the maximum extent possible, LIBRA *Academy* provides our students with disabilities an educational environment that includes them into the mainstream general education population. In accordance with the guidelines and recommendations for a Least Restrictive Environment, LIBRA supports our special education students within the general education program by providing the appropriate accommodations and modifications to our teaching strategies, course content, and scheduling to best meet the needs of our students. In addition, LIBRA also supports our special education students outside the general population when necessary, utilizing a “pull-out” model of servicing students with our RSP itinerant outside the classroom, in a small setting for short periods of time, to provide more targeted, specialized instructional support. This model meets our students’ needs thus far, as our data can confirm: of the original year one 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort of students, LIBRA had 11 RSP students on campus initially. Upon completion of their first year, during their annual Individualized Educational Plan meeting (IEP), 9 students met or exceeded their yearly goals and exited the RSP program.

As our school continues to grow in student population over the next 2 years, we expect to fully include a wider range of students with disabilities, including those requiring more intensive, special day classes. LIBRA *Academy* intends to provide these students with the required services as specified in the IEP which may include special day classes for a portion of their instructional schedule with the assistance of a Special Day teacher we would add to our staff roster, based on student/program need.

### ***English Language Learners***

Similarly, LIBRA *Academy* fully includes its ELL student population into the general education population to the maximum degree possible. In accordance with Education Code policies and best practices, LIBRA organizes our class schedule to ensure that ELL students are grouped appropriately based on their language proficiency. LIBRA’s master schedule is built exclusively on student need; this is a shared commitment of all stakeholders at our school community. Our ELL students are grouped in cohorts based on language proficiency in their core content classes to the maximum degree possible, thereby facilitating their learning. All teachers of our ELL students are skilled in differentiated instructional strategies and current SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English). The goal for our ELL students is of course for them to successfully reach English fluency and reclassify as Proficient English Learners according to the criteria for re-designation (attachment II).

Our ELL students receive language support primarily in their English Language Arts class, under the tutelage of a highly qualified teacher authorized to teach language learners. The ELA teacher utilizes a variety of instructional strategies, appropriate materials, and flexible grouping to provide our ELL’s with optimal support. Additionally, our ELL students are provided with intensive, targeted language instruction during our Intervention and Enrichment sessions (Tier 2).

Understanding the challenges in building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of innovation, critical-thinking, and collaboration in all students and how those challenges can be greater for English Language

Learners, our LIBRA staff knows that we must work smarter in learning different instructional pedagogies if our ELL students are to not only be able to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, but also to assist them in mastery of the new *Common Core Standards (CCSS)* which embed higher-order thinking and literacy skills across content areas.

In preparation for these national expectations for all learners, LIBRA staff have already begun the collegial conversations and professional development around learning how to better design our curriculum and instruction for ELL's to afford them increased opportunities to "think creatively, transform information, engage in inquiry-oriented activity, and construct their own understandings through participating in substantive conversations, and critically, are given the scaffolding and support to be successful" (Gibbons, *English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking*). Sharing best practice, analyzing data, and collaborative planning between teachers during professional development around building academic literacy for ELL students is embedded in our weekly professional development sessions and intervention practices (see Attachment II: EL PD Agenda).

### ***Gifted and Talented/Accelerated Learners***

LIBRA *Academy* also customizes the learning experience for its accelerated learners or GATE students. We have spent the past 2 ½ years strategizing and planning for a variety of learning opportunities based on our students' interests and talents. Teachers are made aware of the specific talents and strengths of our GATE students during professional development and PLC planning time. Their "first good instruction" demonstrates a wide array of strategies such as tiered lessons, Socratic discussions, accelerated pacing, individualized projects, and opportunities for research and subject-matter exploration during enrichment sessions (Tier 2). Furthermore, LIBRA *Academy* offers accelerated learners opportunities for Honors/Advanced Placement course offerings and dual enrollment at local community college campuses to provide a variety of stimulating and enriching opportunities.

**e. Vertical Articulation:** Discuss how you will partner with neighboring schools in the community to ensure the seamless transition from one grade level to the next.

We at LIBRA assertively cultivate partnerships with our neighboring schools. Flyers are distributed to Gage, Edison, Aspire, and the private schools in the area. Phone calls and emails are sent to the administrations of these schools as well. In addition, we utilize the word of mouth from our current students since they are, in many ways, our best ambassadors. Gage middle school traditionally has been the main feeder school into to LIBRA. A group of teachers and students visit classrooms at these schools, reaching out to students on all tracks. LIBRA reaches out consciously to all level of students in the recruitment process (including special Ed). Teachers that do the recruiting from LIBRA have created contacts at Gage to help keep the lines of communication open for recruitment. We have discussed the possibility of collaborating during the school year with middle school 8<sup>th</sup> graders, including them in some of LIBRA's school events so they could experience the culture of our campus during the school year. Planning and implementation are currently in the development stage as well as the possible creation of drama groups to visit elementary schools, or big brother sister programs to start early advertisement of LIBRA to the elementary grades.

In future years LIBRA will need to recruit the students from a wider area. We anticipate continued enthusiasm from our staff undertaking this endeavor and the continued successful recruitment of LIBRA students.

Gage Middle School is the main feeder school for LIBRA *Academy*. We have intentionally recruited 8<sup>th</sup> grade students during the Spring Semester before 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In 2008, the original design team members facilitated 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom presentations and held parent meetings that demonstrated the vision and mission of LIBRA *Academy*. 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were given flyers and time for Q & A in order to make their decision to attend our school.

In 2009, we included student representatives in our recruiting outreach sessions at the Middle School and found this to be an enhancement to our process. Students spoke from their experiences and had many highlights to share with potential students including bringing future siblings. The students actually lead the recruiting sessions and the teacher facilitates the questioning process to ensure all information is equitably disseminated.

In 2010, we continued to employ our students as the main recruiting representatives and allow them to lead the classroom discussions and speak about the realities of a small school and the highlights of their experiences. Throughout the years we have included diverse student backgrounds that include but are not limited to EL, Special Ed, and GATE.

As we look to the demographics of our new school location, we will need to broaden our recruiting area to include Edison Middle School and the surrounding Charter Schools. As our program develops we anticipate reaching out to the elementary schools and look forward to building the social and educational capacity that creates an integrated system that has a common intellectual mission.

**f. Early Care and Education: Not applicable**

**g. Service Plan for Special Education:** Explain how the school will implement and monitor the special education compliance processes.

The entire LIBRA *Academy* staff ensures that all students, no matter what disabilities or challenges exist, will be provided the highest quality educational experience possible. To this end, we implement in earnest, the policies and procedures set forth in the Los Angeles Unified School District's *Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual and Modified Consent Decree Outcomes*. Our staff has engaged in and will continue to receive professional development in specially designed instructional strategies, supporting a least restrictive environment, and understanding and implementing the modifications and accommodations specified in each student's IEP/504 plan.

Teachers at LIBRA *Academy* are currently learning to co-teach, co-plan, modify instruction, and utilize paraprofessionals in the general education classroom to fully include our students with disabilities and ensure they are given equal access to the curriculum. LIBRA has allotted professional development time for data-analysis, sharing best practices, and inviting local district specialists and itinerants to provide training and assistance in the above areas. Our already personalized, safe, and welcoming school environment provides the foundation for a viable **full inclusion** academic program for our students with disabilities. Although our students with special needs will and are fully included in the mainstream program, we understand that should our students require additional intensive academic support, we will explore various opportunities for

providing students with small group “pull-out” targeted teaching/intervention and support, one-on-one personal attention with a highly qualified special education teacher, and supplemental instructional materials and strategies to ensure our students with special needs are successful.

Furthermore, LIBRA ensures our special needs students are enrolled in a rigorous A-G course sequence with the appropriate support for their success. Special Day and severely disabled students are mainstreamed in the general population to the optimal degree possible. The IEP team determines and guarantees collaboratively, what the best environment is for each student. The LIBRA team complies with the following four step process in determining special education services:

- ~Referral for assessment
- ~Assessment
- ~Development and implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- ~IEP Review

LIBRA *Academy* staff is aware of and will receive ongoing professional development in the following areas: understanding of and how to interpret both 504's and IEP's; how to provide adequate support and modifications to curriculum and instruction utilizing differentiation and scaffolding strategies; promoting and explicitly teaching positive behavior and social skills to ensure a safe and nurturing environment for all students.

**Appendix E further outlines LIBRA *Academy*'s Service Plan for Special Education.**

## **B-2. Professional Development (PD)**

**a. Professional Culture:** Describe the professional culture you envision at the school.

*“...strong collaborative teacher communities engendered artisanship in teaching-by sustaining teachers’ commitment to improving practice through dialogue and collaboration around engaging students in school and content, and by sharing and investing repertoires of effective classroom practice” (Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002).*

At LIBRA *Academy*, we create a professional culture that emphasizes collaboration and professional inquiry to improve future instructional practice. Teachers engage in this cycle of inquiry to promote students’ character, academic, and emotional growth. This cycle of inquiry promotes the two facets of our school’s mission: academic excellence and social development. Teachers at LIBRA have several opportunities throughout the year to collaborate to refine curriculum in order to maximize student growth in these areas. Within this collaborative model, we promote a culture of leadership and accountability by giving teachers the opportunity to lead PD based on their areas of expertise and the needs of our students in addition to having the freedom to make critical decisions around curriculum and instruction. LIBRA *Academy* teachers recognize that through collaborative inquiry we can continue to develop into a quality educational institution known for academic rigor, equitable access, and authentic personalization.



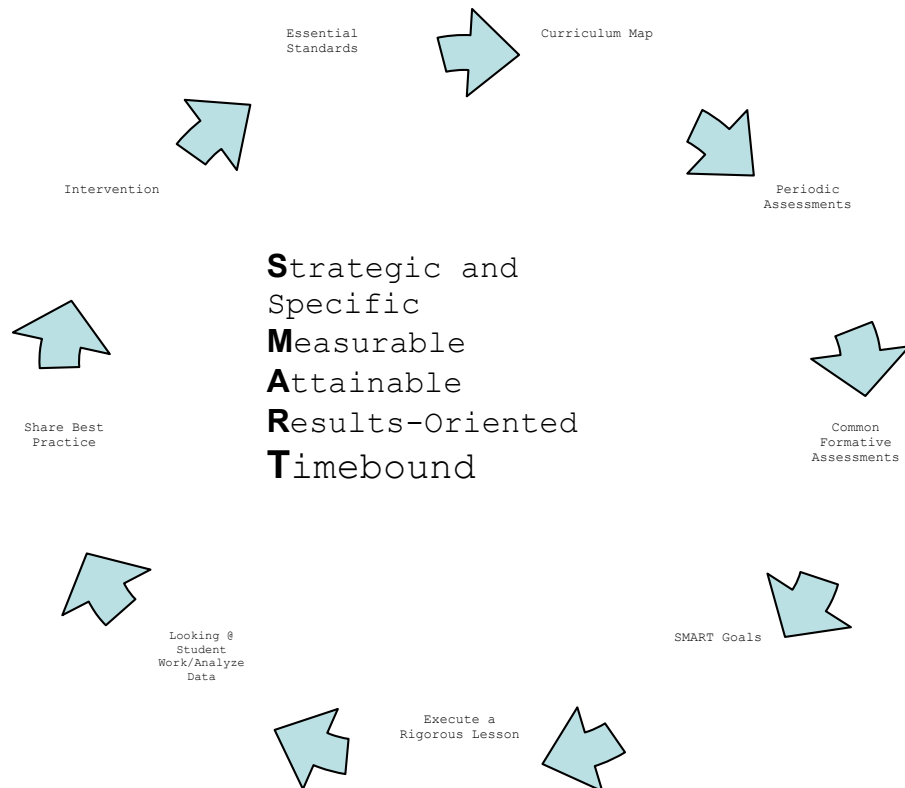
LIBRA *Academy* ensures a culture of collaboration for improved student achievement with a professional development plan that includes time and resources to improve instruction and student growth. In accordance with current research on 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching and learning, we at LIBRA commit to providing teachers with ample opportunities to share their practice and reflect on what works and doesn't work with colleagues. The emphasis of this collaboration is for teachers to build a deep understanding of their students' learning needs and create a curriculum that is responsive to those needs and produces increased results in student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010).

How do we hold each other accountable? Initially, teachers begin analyzing data and identifying instructional needs during a summer retreat. Then, teachers meet every Monday for trainings to continue identifying and addressing instructional needs. Teachers also use common planning periods to collaborate with content area partners to develop and discuss common assessments and student progress. This content area collaboration guarantees that all teachers have colleagues with whom to discuss best practices. LIBRA's open door policy further assures the constant discussion and search for best practices by allowing, not only colleagues, but also parents to observe classroom instruction. Throughout the year, teachers implement best practices and share them with colleagues to develop instructional consistency, which ultimately benefits the students. Furthermore, teachers hold each other accountable by sharing materials developed during common planning periods, including curriculum maps, pacing plans, and common assessments. Teachers discuss materials during weekly professional development meetings and publish them online.

During professional development meetings and common planning periods, teachers use LIBRA's continuous cycle of improvement, which is represented in the following graphic organizer:

The graphic organizer demonstrates how teachers at LIBRA will engage in data-driven conversations and curriculum planning to ensure that we make appropriate decisions with regard to our instruction and aligning those decisions based solely on student need.

It is our goal for students to excel in their standards-based content classes, including demonstrating the "habits of mind" they are cultivating in their Advisory classes. The goal is for the "habits of mind" to prepare students for success that



extends into their employment and personal lives.

The faculty engages in the cycle throughout each semester using the following guide:

- Analyze School-wide Data (Summer Retreat Workshop)
- Content Area Teams Identify Essential Standards (Summer Meetings)
- Develop Curriculum Maps (Summer Meetings)
- Use Periodic Assessments (During Assessment Windows)
- Create Common Formative Assessments (Common Planning Periods)
- Develop Smart Goals (Common Planning Periods)
- Execute Data-Driven Lessons
- Analyze Student Data (Common Planning Periods)
- Share Best Practices (Common Planning Periods)
- Plan and Execute Intervention

LIBRA *Academy* teachers use *Response to Instruction and Intervention* (RTI2) methods for academic and behavioral intervention. During our weekly professional development sessions, teachers initially focus on Tier 1 strategies to minimize the number of students who require focused intervention. As teachers gather and analyze data, we determine who requires more academic and behavioral intervention and discuss our findings at professional development meetings. After implementing Tier 2 intervention strategies, teachers determine who requires Tier 3 intervention and provide intensive support (see Attachment III: Pyramid of Intervention).

To facilitate communication among individual teachers and collaborative teams, LIBRA *Academy* staff currently uses email as a primary form of communication. This year we will use the both email and the school website to disseminate information and encourage interaction among teachers and with students. In addition, teachers meet in content-specific professional learning communities at least once per week during their common-planning time, to continue their cycle of improvement. Collected artifacts from these meetings such as curriculum maps, pacing plans, common assessments, and student learning outcomes are shared at faculty meetings and archived in professional development binders for future reference and published for viewing on *Google Docs*.

- b. Professional Development:** Describe what effective PD will look like at your school. Identify the school's goals and strategy for ongoing PD. How are PD strategies tied to the goals identified in Section A and the specific needs of the student population?

*"Staff development is the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students. NSDC's Standards for Staff Development recognizes that sustained, intellectually rigorous staff development is essential for everyone who affects students' learning"* (National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development, 2001).

The staff at LIBRA *Academy* recognizes that sustained, intellectually rigorous staff development is essential to meeting the needs of our students. To that end, we commit to organizing our professional development sessions in accordance with the NSDC standards of context, process, and content (NSDC 2001) to guarantee that our collaborative time is spent in professional learning communities (context), that these communities are data-driven and researched-based (process),

and that the result of these collegial conversations lead to quality teaching and improved student learning (content).

Effective professional development at LIBRA focuses on meeting the individual, social, and academic needs of every student. Socially, we endeavor to develop confident, empathetic young adults by providing various forums for discussion and emotional growth such as a weekly advisory class, retreats, field trips, and team building activities. Academically, we strive to ensure that all students reach proficiency in all content areas at each grade level by using the Cycle of Inquiry for Professional Learning Communities. In this cycle, teachers in content area teams analyze student data, which initially consists of performance on state exams such as the CST, CAHSEE, and CELDT. Next, they select an area of focus by framing the issue or question. Then, they create lesson plans to teach focus standards and formative assessments to monitor progress. Before giving a final summative assessment, teachers modify lessons and strategies to re-teach the material. Finally, teachers collect data and analyze it to begin the cycle again.

As previously mentioned, LIBRA's goal is to have every teacher participate in the creation and implementation of professional development training by encouraging every teacher to lead training sessions that focus on areas of academic or social need as determined by collected student data or observation. LIBRA *Academy* ensures that teachers can accomplish this by recruiting and training teachers who are willing and able to assess and address both academic and emotional needs. Furthermore, LIBRA develops these abilities by using a summer planning retreat to emphasize the mission as well as to introduce strategies for encouraging academic and social development of every student. Weekly professional development meetings also serve to better address the learning needs of our student population, including English Language Learners, students with special needs, and gifted students.

LIBRA *Academy* has allocated 90 minutes of professional development time every week for professional training sessions as well as collaborative work time. The Professional Development Committee oversees the scheduling of training sessions and work time to provide teachers with resources and time to implement new strategies and reflect on effectiveness of those strategies.

### **Professional Development Opportunities Based on Teaching Standards**

#### **Retreat**

1<sup>st</sup> Monday: Advisory Teams

2<sup>nd</sup> Monday: PLC Teams

3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays: School-wide Teacher Effectiveness & T1 Sessions

#### **Retreat Sessions**

- Planning and Preparation
  - Essential Standards, Curriculum Mapping, & Pacing
  - Data Analysis & Formative Assessments
  - Using Technology to Manage Data and Communication
- Student Advocacy
  - Advisory Roles & Planning
- Intervention:
  - RTI2 Basics: Tier 1 Academic Intervention

#### **Advisory Team Sessions**

- Planning and Preparation
  - Gaining Knowledge of Students' Interests and Cultural Heritage
- The Classroom Environment
  - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport
- Instruction
  - Monitoring of Student Learning
  - Giving Feedback to Students
  - Student Self-Assessment
- Additional Professional Responsibilities
  - Communication with Families
- Professional Growth
  - Reflecting on Practice

#### PLC Team Sessions

- Planning and Preparation
  - Knowing Students' Skills, Knowledge, and Language Proficiency
  - Knowing Students' Special Needs
  - Sequence Alignment and Clarity
  - Designing Student Assessments
- The Classroom Environment
  - Establishing a Culture of Learning
- Instruction
  - Using Assessments in Instruction to Advance Student Learning
  - Adjusting to Meet Student Needs
- Additional Professional Responsibilities
  - Communicating with Families About the Instructional Program and Students
- Professional Growth
  - Collaboration with Colleagues
  - Professional Inquiry and Collaboration
  - Reflecting on Practice

#### School-wide Teacher Effectiveness & Tier1 Sessions

- Planning and Preparation
  - Knowing How Adolescents and Adults Learn
  - Analyzing Data
  - Differentiation
- The Classroom Environment
  - Establishing a Culture of Learning
  - Managing Classroom Procedures
  - Manage Student Behavior
- Instruction
  - Communicating with Students
  - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
  - Structures to Engage Students in Learning
- Additional Professional Responsibilities
  - Maintaining Accurate Records
  - Engaging Families in the Instructional Program
- Professional Growth

- Reflecting on Practice

### **Professional Development Schedule**

8/22-24: Retreat

- Revisit Mission & Vision
- Designing & Using Common Assessments
- Preparing for Advisory, Enrichment & Intervention
- Using Technology to Manage Data and Communication
  - MyData, CORE K12, Google Docs, & LIBRA Website

8/30: Classroom Management & Advisory Planning (Advisory)

9/12: Common Assessment Data Analysis & Intervention (PLC)

9/19: Enrichment & Intervention Planning (School-wide)

9/26: Data Analysis – Reflect on 1<sup>st</sup> grading period results (School-wide)

10/3: Advisory Session

10/10: PLC Session: Introduction to Common Core Standards

10/17: Assisting Children with Autism: Session 1

10/24: Tier 1 Strategy Evaluation & Tier 2 Implementation

10/31: Evaluating Intervention

11/7: Writing Across the Curriculum: Day 1

11/14: PLC Session

11/21: Writing Across the Curriculum: Day 2

11/28: Differentiation

12/5: Assisting Children with Autism: Session 2

12/12: PLC Session: Common Core Standards cross-walk

12/19: Semester Data Analysis & Reflection

3/5: Advisory Session

3/12: PLC Session

3/19: Establishing a Culture of Learning

3/26: Engaging Families in the Instructional Program

4/2: Advisory Session

4/9: PLC Session

4/16: Scaffolding vs. Rescuing

4/23: Communicating with Students

4/30: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques

5/7: Advisory Session

5/14: PLC Session: Common Core standards preliminary planning

5/21: Creating Structures to Engage Students in Learning

6/4: Advisory Session

6/11: Creating Portfolios

6/18: Maintaining Accurate Records

6/25: End of Year Data Analysis & Reflection

**c. Teacher Orientation:** Describe the orientation program for new and existing teachers.

Initially, new teachers to LIBRA *Academy* meet other faculty members through the interview process, which is conducted by a panel of teachers and staff members. Upon hiring, the principal provides new teachers with relevant information including calendars, schedules, and contact information. Both new and existing teachers are given the opportunity to work with colleagues

throughout the summer to design and modify curricula in content specific teams. If a new teacher is new to the profession, LIBRA provides onsite support providers as mentors to help manage BTSA.

The Summer Retreat at LIBRA *Academy* provides all teachers with an opportunity to revisit the school's mission and vision, introduce common equity and access strategies, and review curricula. On the first day of the retreat, teachers review the mission and vision and begin discussing common strategies. On the second day, teachers discuss how the advisory program will be executed. On the final day, teachers explore enrichment and intervention in relation to each content area. Discussions on differentiation occur during common planning time with content specific groups.

The retreat in combination with the common planning time provides new teachers with sufficient support to feel comfortable implementing LIBRA's vision.

**d. PD Program Evaluation:** Describe how the PD program will be evaluated to assess its success.

Because the purpose of professional development is to improve teacher effectiveness, the primary evaluators of our professional development plan will be the teachers. The ultimate determiner of effectiveness, however, will be student achievement data. At the end of every PD session, the Professional Development Committee gives teachers a survey on the effectiveness of the training. Surveys will measure engagement, timeliness, and relevance as well as provide feedback for future trainings. These surveys give teachers an opportunity to suggest modifications to the trainings and to identify areas of need. The Professional Development Committee reviews the surveys and modifies future trainings as necessary. At the end of each semester, teachers evaluate the PD program as a whole by looking at data, including parent and student surveys on quality of instruction.

### **B-3. Assessments and School-wide Data**

**a. Student Assessment Plan:** Describe the school-wide assessment plan for the school.

#### **Assessments**

LIBRA *Academy* believes that we must use multiple, frequent assessments in order to measure and address student learning needs in a timely manner. We subscribe to the following with regard to assessment strategies:

*"The assessments best suited to guide improvements in instruction and student learning are the quizzes, tests, writing assignments, and other assessments teachers administer on a regular basis in their classrooms. However, to use classroom assessment to make improvements, teachers must see their assessments as an integral part of the instructional process and as an essential element in their efforts to help students learn" (Guskey, 2007).*

To this end, teachers at LIBRA will take the following approach to assessing students:

1. We will use assessments as a source of information for both students and teachers;

2. We will follow assessments with high-quality corrective instruction;
3. We will give students second chances to demonstrate success.

Each teacher at LIBRA develops both summative and formative assessments collaboratively, and engages in a data-driven protocol to analyze results and inform our next instructional steps. Authentic assessments such as performance-based tasks, portfolios, group and individual projects, presentations, and problem-solving scenarios will also be utilized to measure student learning. Effective development and use of rubrics are a key component in ensuring equity, clear expectations, and fair assessment of student outcomes. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and academic progress by refining and revising their work, participating in data-analysis protocols, and developing their own rubrics. Student assessment data is analyzed regularly by LIBRA staff as part of our continuous cycle of improvement and collaboration. Timely results obtained from student work samples assist us in providing targeted intervention and enrichment opportunities for our students.

LIBRA *Academy* commits to using a variety of assessments to analyze student learning and achievement of the content standards. Teachers in their PLCs and with the professional development provided by our intervention Team, design authentic formative assessments throughout their curriculum units to give regular feedback to students and inform their instruction. Assessment data is utilized to strategically place students in the correct Tier 2 intervention they require.

The table below demonstrates the various assessments LIBRA has administered to gauge student performance:

Assessment	Grade	Frequency	Purpose
Universal ELA/Math diagnostic	All	Prior to school year for 9 <sup>th</sup> grade; 1 <sup>st</sup> week of school 10-11	Assess gaps in learning; proactive determination of skills for increased emphasis and re-teaching
CST	9-11	Summative end of year	Required; annual performance index
CAHSEE	10-12	District/State determined dates	Measures proficiency in ELA/Math
CELDT	9-12	Annually	Measures progress of EL learners
PLC created summative unit tests(midterms/finals)	9-12	Ongoing	Authentic, timely measures of proficiency
PLC created common formative assessments	9-12	Ongoing	Immediate feedback to students and teachers on proficiency levels
Projects/portfolios/exhibitions	9-12	To be developed	Measure authentic 21 <sup>st</sup> skills of collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, habits of mind



## b. Graduation Requirements

Libra *Academy* will proudly graduate its first cohort of students as the Class of 2013 in June of that year. That year will not only mark LIBRA's fourth year as a pilot school, but will also be a milestone for our graduates, since they are our pioneer group of 9<sup>th</sup> graders who bravely choose to take this journey with us. It is our intent to ensure that our school adheres to the current requirements as set forth by the *Los Angeles Unified School District* and graduate our first class with 230 credits, demonstrating they have successfully completed 230 credits and fulfilling all A-G requirements. Understanding that as a pilot school with autonomy over our instructional program, LIBRA is currently pursuing options to our graduation requirements that may include:

- *Required student exhibition of learning or portfolio combining computer literacy and service learning into the final project;*
- *Omitting (as is LAUSD) the Health/Life Skills course and embedding health units in Biology. We may officially retain the Career Development course for all 9<sup>th</sup> graders as their LIBRA elective in lieu of Life Skills.*
- *LIBRA intends to determine a required number of service learning hours (100) as a graduation requirement.*

Students graduating from LIBRA *Academy* High School in 2013 must meet the following graduation requirements:

### A. Satisfactory completion of 230 credits.

Class of 2013 Graduation Requirements		Class of 2014-2015 Graduation Requirements	
Course Type	Credits		Credits
Core Curriculum	160	Core Curriculum	155
Elective Courses	70	Elective Courses	75
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>230</b>
English	40	English	40
College Preparatory Mathematics	40	College Preparatory Mathematics	40
Laboratory Science/Biological Science	20	Laboratory Science/Biological Science	20
Social Science	30	Social Science	30
Visual and Performing Arts	10	Visual and Performing Arts	10
Applied Technology	10	Applied Technology	10
Health	5	Health	5
Life Skills	5		
Physical Education	20	Physical Education	20

B. Passing the California High School Exit Examination.

To receive a high school diploma in the state of California, students must take and pass the English language arts and the math sections of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) with a scaled score of 350 or higher.

- C. LIBRA is currently pursuing options to our graduation requirements that may include required student exhibition of learning or portfolio combining computer literacy and service learning into the final project.

**c. Data Collection and Monitoring:** Describe the school-wide data collection and monitoring plan.

In addition to analyzing student academic data, LIBRA *Academy* stakeholders examine discipline incidents and suspension rates to determine more productive intervention methods and to engage in individual counseling. Finally, we analyze student retention rates and school climate surveys during the school year and into the next year in order to inform ourselves of the effectiveness of our instructional program. Also, qualitative data is collected and analyzed to gain insight into student perception of how well our school meets their academic and social expectations. The inherent nature of being a small school allows faculty and staff to regularly and thoroughly analyze school and student data in order to improve and inform our instruction.

Other student achievement data that is analyzed regularly at LIBRA to inform whether our students are succeeding are:

- Attendance rates
- Credit attainment
- Course pass rates
- GPAs
- standardized tests such as CST/CAHSEE/Periodic assessments, PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP exams
- Student Exhibitions of learning
- LAUSD Performance Meter Goals and Benchmarks

During professional development sessions, LIBRA staff is engaged in various data-driven dialogue protocols to assist in analyzing data and promoting collegial conversations that lead to problem-solving and collective inquiry.

## **CATEGORY TWO: School Culture, Climate, and Infrastructure**

### **B-4: School Culture and Climate**

**a. Description of School Culture:** Describe the culture and climate envisioned for the school.

*“Underneath the operating network of our roles as teachers, classified staff and administrators lies a deeper, less visible structure called culture. Culture is a part of every group of people who gather together, whether in work groups, neighborhoods, schools or large corporations. Culture's power lies in the ability to dictate everything about a group, from what it discusses to the beliefs group members hold in common and the values the group teaches. Culture is a visible and usable tool in schools, where relationships tend to hold more power than official roles and titles. Research has identified a positive connection between a school's culture and student achievement. Culture is an effective tool that is critical to the success of students” (Leslie Goldring).*

At LIBRA *Academy* we place great emphasis on creating a nurturing school culture where teachers attend closely to each student's learning needs. LIBRA *Academy* is a physically safe and clean environment that provides a strong, positive academic climate fostering learning in all classrooms. Academic excellence is the main focus in our classrooms. It is evident that our students have a more relaxed, academically focused attitude than those at the large campus that is adjacent to us. Failure is not expected nor is it accepted here. Our students, by and large, proudly pass their classes. Our matriculation rate from grade to grade clearly supports that high academic expectations are integrated into the culture of our school. In 2009, 89% of our 9<sup>th</sup> grade class (109 students) matriculated to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

At LIBRA our culture is branded by the strong sense of “family.” The level of personalization exceeds what happens at a large comprehensive high school. The school culture creates a caring environment for students in which students are known by name by everyone on campus. Even out of classroom personnel are familiar with students by name. Students are given individual attention in many areas. For example, through differentiated instruction, IGP's (Individualized Graduation Plan) and team-building activities in advisory, we create a healthy dynamic for student- to- student interactions as well as student- to- teacher interactions. LIBRA *Academy* students are likely to be personally greeted on the campus at the front gate every morning they enter the campus. LIBRA students are fortunate to have teachers with open-door policies at lunchtime for extra help or to use classroom resources they may not have access to at home. LIBRA's culture of academic excellence is evident in the programs we have adopted. LIBRA has adopted instructional strategies learned from the *Equity & Access* institute we attended. These strategies are implemented in all content areas. Staff members have been trained in classroom strategies that provide learning for all students. At LIBRA, a non-negotiable intervention program is mandated for students who need re-teaching in standards that they have not mastered.

When a school has a positive school culture, students want to come to school. LIBRA *Academy* proudly boasts an average 96% attendance rate which clearly indicates that LIBRA students want to be at this school. Most students are willing and want to participate in school activities whether it be sports clubs (soccer and walking), annual dances, fieldtrips, or school traditions which are being created as we progress. Many LIBRA students have voiced that they feel like they are at a “better” school. As a data-driven, information rich school, we diligently collect and review student surveys, questionnaires, and observe interactions to determine the strengths and areas of improvement of our school.

LIBRA's culture is also defined by the positive relationship it has built with parents. On any given day, our parents are visible and welcomed to our small campus and greeted by name. Parents who live nearby are often seen bringing "homemade goodies" to our office staff. Teachers willingly "loan" their classrooms during their conference periods to parent groups to host their monthly discussion groups on various school-related topics. Parents have taken the lead in assisting our small school with fundraisers, donations, and promotional events as well. This culture of positive and active parental involvement is evident in the large percentage of parental involvement in parent conferences and other school events. The traditional "parent conference/back-to-school" events are more like *family nights* at LIBRA with parents and students not only speaking academics, but socializing, fundraising, and networking. The principal hosts a monthly "Coffee with the Principal" parent meeting, inviting parents to this informal, open discussion forum to express their concerns, ideas, and support.

LIBRA's *adult culture* includes many positive attributes such as high levels of accountability for our teachers and a strong sense of collegiality. Our staff is impressively committed to adapting and remaining flexible in matters affecting the success of our students. The staff is supportive and encourages adult learning whether it is sharing resources, knowledge gained from conferences or experiences. The adult culture at LIBRA mirrors that of the students' culture: our accomplishments are achieved because of the collaborative emphasis we place in the work we do. Teachers are members of several teams on campus, each dependent on another. Group norms, clear expectations, and protocols for engagement all contribute to building a culture of team work at LIBRA. Our staff strives to keep open lines of communication amongst themselves. This takes place in a variety of forums such as email, Google docs, lunch meetings, and conversations at professional development sessions.

Part of LIBRA's positive school culture includes celebrating student accomplishments in academic excellence as well as personal endeavors students achieve. As a new school in its third year of operation, we are still creating "traditions" that hopefully become a legacy for LIBRA. The honor roll is a regular celebration throughout the school year. We also celebrate LIBRA students who make significant gains in CST scores by having a yearly raffle with electronics and gift cards to promote school wide effort in standardized testing. At LIBRA we are aiming to create an annual award for our student who exemplifies the school motto of "balancing character, mind and well being." This would be a graduating senior who earns this award and we would keep a wall of fame at the school to showcase these deserving students year to year. Our newly formed student leadership class has been instrumental this year in creating and organizing school spirit activities, socials, and lunchtime gatherings which all help to define the culture and traditions at LIBRA Academy.

## ADVISORY

*“Advisory...is not a new idea but rather has re-emerged as an essential structure to personalize and humanize educational institutions. As George Wood says, { If we want to hold kids to high standards, if we want them all engaged in school, if we’re not going to give up on some kids, we have to have a way to hold on to every kid, and advisory is the key way}” (Wildwood Outreach Center).*

The development of LIBRA’s Advisory program has been an ongoing process of trial and error from year to year. Our mission in advisory is to focus on the whole-child, acting as mentors for students to not only guide them academically but also support their social and emotional development. This endeavor has been both a challenge and reward for our LIBRA team. In order to accomplish this mission for our students, the content of advisory has been designed by our teacher-teams to emphasize the development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century students who are capable of “balancing character, mind and well-being.” Students develop skills and abilities to behave as responsible citizens focused on academics and mindful of their own personal, emotional and physical needs. The custom-designed content of our advisory course provides developmental guidance to all students at all grade levels. Students are exposed to a variety of activities and experiences that enhance their emotional intelligence, character development, interpersonal skills, as well as personal management skills. LIBRA’s advisory course has proven to be a key structure in accomplishing our mission in providing inner-city students with a highly personalized, supportive experience.

Our Advisory structure is organized to maintain a 23:1 student/teacher ratio, supporting the mission of personalization. Every student is programmed into an advisory section we call “LIBRA TIME” for 45 minutes, 1 day per week. The curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade advisory focuses on lessons, discussions, and activities that emphasize personalization, team-building, and developing interpersonal communication skills with peers and adults. Our goal in these lower grades is to begin building a strong foundation for safe relationships between student peers and adults. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, the advisory content continues to build on character development but also guides students to make decisions in preparation for their future college and career options. The content includes writing personal essays and learning the process to applying for scholarships and financial aid. In line with exploring the college path, LIBRA students are exposed to opportunities for career exploration. Guest speakers, college visits and possible internships are part of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade advisory curriculum. In all grade levels, the advisory teacher facilitates academic guidance for students. The advisory teacher becomes a direct advocate for their advisory students in specified ways. For example, there is intentional ongoing communication with academic teachers about the academic progress of all students. The advisor is also responsible for reviewing student report cards, assisting student academic/behavioral contract completion, and facilitating parent conference sessions. The advisory program strives to create a comfortable, communicative, and positive dynamic while enhancing the high school experience for all LIBRA students.

Our original intention when designing the structure for LIBRA’s Advisory was for teachers to stay with the same advisory group of students the entire four years, building a strong student-adult relationship. We were able to maintain this structure in our first two years of implementation. However, due to staffing challenges in our third year, veteran teachers at LIBRA decided that we should divide amongst grade levels so that we did not have all our new staff members advising the same grade level. As a result, each grade level advisory team this year is led by a veteran teacher to ensure equity and consistency in designing and implementing the curriculum across grade levels.

In our third year of refining our Advisory program, and after many professional development sessions with staff, LIBRA has adopted the developmental guidance characteristics of: emotional

intelligence, character development, interpersonal skills, and personal management. We have designed a graphic organizer to better visualize what our vision is:

***Advisory Mission:***  
To Provide Developmental Guidance

- Emotional Intelligence**
- Managing fear, peer pressure, anger, rejection
- Character Development**
- Confidence building, self esteem, constructive choices, positive decision- making
- Interpersonal**
- Communication, conflict resolution, team-building
- Personal Management**
- Personal responsibility and accountability

( attachment IV: Advisory Mission)

In alignment with the characteristics mentioned above, each grade-level Advisory team has created a curriculum map of their intended advisory curriculum, designed formative and summative assessments of learning, rubrics, and collectively decided on a uniform grading policy that is fair and equitable across all grade-levels and clearly demonstrates clear expectations to students. Each grade-level advisory focus is briefly described below:

**9<sup>th</sup> Grade**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisory, we utilize a curriculum called the ***Premier Go*** Program which is a character development program specifically designed to reinforce and extend understanding of the timeless principles in Sean Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. In addition, our staff has incorporated many activities which promote discussions, team-building, and interpersonal relationships, which make the transition from middle school to high school a smoother one.

Implementation of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisory program supports school efforts to:

- Establish and maintain a safe learning environment for all students.
- Have a positive impact on character development, social behavior and academic progress of our students.
- Equip students with the personal, interpersonal and organizational skills needed for success in life.

**10<sup>th</sup> Grade**

The 10<sup>th</sup> grade Advisory curriculum extends and complements the attributes introduced in the previous year. The curriculum uses the elements of personal guidance from the *EduCare Foundation* and embeds instructional strategies learned from our staff training in *Equity and Access*, and LAUSD programs. In addition, each lesson has been aligned with LIBRA *Academy's* Mission and Vision statement. Our advisory team meets on weekly basis to ensure that all the members

understand the goal of the lesson, the class discussion questions, and the assessment that is given to the students. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade advisory curriculum has been divided into various themes that reflect the needs of the students (see Attachment V: 10<sup>th</sup> grade Advisory unit). Finally, at the end of each theme students are asked to reflect on their learning experience and provide evidence that measures their learning. Once the theme or unit is completed, the advisory team is also reflects and discusses the strengths and weakness of the theme, lessons, and assessments. This continuous cycle of collective inquiry demonstrates the 10<sup>th</sup> grade advisory team's dedication to create curriculum that reflects the Mission and Vision of LIBRA *Academy*.

### 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

The focus of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade Advisory content includes the integration of personal management and decision-making as students incorporate college and career planning to achieve their life goals. Through a variety of activities and their current Career Research Project, LIBRA's juniors are getting closer to making decisions about their future. Students will edit their college resumes, write their personal statements, plan and participate in community service projects and explore college majors.

99% of the junior class was enrolled in Career Development as 9<sup>th</sup> graders where they explored careers and college majors. They then produced a documentary of their experience that they presented in class via video. As juniors in Advisory, they are deciding if that 9<sup>th</sup> grade experience and career choice is the one they should pursue. Much of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade advisory content involves students in the use of technology and research.

As student matriculate to their senior year, much of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade advisory content will be built around further development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of inquiry, communication, and critical-thinking as they design a culminating exhibition of their 4 year experience at LIBRA and reflect on their own personal growth in the areas of emotional intelligence and character development.

**b. Student Support and Success:** Describe exactly what student success will mean at your school.

At LIBRA *Academy*, we truly believe that not only does our mission in educating the whole child speak to how we demonstrate student support for their success, but more importantly, it is our current actions in planning and delivering our rigorous Advisement program in synergy with our non-negotiable Intervention Program that exemplify what our stakeholders are willing to do each and every day, to guarantee every child is successful in meeting their graduation requirements, future goals, and productive citizenry.

As our mission states, a successful student at LIBRA *Academy* is one that will not only obtain a high school diploma; a LIBRA student will be prepared to enter the workforce and/or college with a well-rounded liberal arts education and the confidence to explore the plethora of options available to them so they can become productive, fulfilled citizens.

### Intervention

While school districts around the country are attempting to understand and implement a response to intervention model, LIBRA *Academy* has spent the last 2 years living the theory behind the model:



*“The RTI process involves targeting specific areas on which students are struggling and applying increasingly intensive research-proven interventions until the threat to learning is alleviated” (W. Bender, 2009).*

At LIBRA we strongly believe that “learning is the constant, and time is the variable” (Dufour). Therefore, LIBRA is committed to responding to students’ learning needs through a systemic intervention system (RTI2) that provides students with multiple opportunities to receive targeted re-teaching, re-assessment, and enrichment to guarantee their mastery of essential content and cognitive skills.

We at LIBRA *Academy* firmly believe that our academic program supported by a systemic intervention plan in synergy with our advisement program, will create the conditions our students require that will lead to their success. In fact, our data (see appendix) after two years of constant revision, data-analysis, and experimentation, shows that our intervention and advisement program is resulting in success. The staff at LIBRA engages regularly in the “problem-solving” process during professional development sessions and PLC common planning time. The process we engage in requires the entire staff to 1) identify the problem (data analysis); 2) engage in problem analysis; 3) Design our instructional/intervention actions; 4) evaluate whether our actions worked. We engage in this problem-solving process throughout the year to determine whether our students are successfully reaching proficiency not only in the content standards, but in achieving our goals for behavior and development guidance (advisory). We are truly convinced our stellar API score of 812 points last year and 726 points previously earned are attributed to our unwavering focus to this problem-solving process.

LIBRA has designed a unique three-tiered approach to academic and behavioral intervention and support utilizing the *Multi-Tiered Framework & Problem-Solving Process* (LAUSD). We firmly believe “effective use of instructional time, specifically, academic engaged time, is a strong predictor of student achievement at all levels.” (LAUSD). Yet we recognize a need to provide intervention for our reluctant learners and our non-learners. Therefore, we spend countless professional development hours researching and increasing our collective understanding of what intervention means, what our core instruction should consist of, and what it means to target student needs and re-teach. We determine who our reluctant learners are and how we can provide more study/hall and study skills opportunities to address their needs *versus* our non-learners who have not reached proficiency due to various gaps in their learning. Our LIBRA *Pyramid of Intervention* (revised 4 times) is a graphic organizer that represents our commitment to ensuring our students are academically successful (attachment III: Pyramid of Intervention). Our structure includes the following components:

#### **Tier 1: Core Curriculum (good first instruction)**

- Universal data collection; formative assessments
- Researched-based strategies
- 80% students successful

#### **Tier 2: Strategic/Supplemental Interventions**

- Small, strategic groups
- Frequent assessments

- Modified instructional strategies

### **Tier 3: Intensive Interventions**

- Narrow/focused curriculum
- High intensity re-teaching
- Most frequent assessments

LIBRA *Academy* promotes academic excellence across the curriculum to prepare the whole child to meet the demands of future four-year institutions and producing productive citizens. The mission of the Intervention program at LIBRA *Academy* is to advocate for and encourage equal access to appropriate education to children of all levels. To accomplish this mission, an Intervention Team was created. Its members, along with the school principal and counselor meet on a monthly basis to analyze data, develop and implement instructional programs that provide struggling children an opportunity to learn the challenging material in a different context. Students who perform at their level and are mastering the standards will be allowed to participate in enrichment classes. This ongoing process resulted in the following timeline of modifications over the last three years:

#### **Year One 2009-2010**

- Focus for 9<sup>th</sup> Grade: Numeracy/Literacy
  - Placement of students depend on 4 weeks grading period (D/Fs)
  - Core classes pulled-out: During the day, struggling students are pull-out from elective classes 2 to 3 times per week to be taught by credentialed staff as parallel class.
  - Enter/Exit: Students enter/exit depends on skill level and mastery of standards.
- Homework Hall: 2 times per week for intentional non-learners; afterschool.
- Afterschool targeted tutoring in Math/ELA for students at risk (C-/D) taught by credentialed teacher.
- Weekly Student contracts for monitoring/accountability/parent involvement-monitored by Advisory Teacher.
- “Revolving Door” Fridays during the last 2 hours: teachers host a variety of targeted topics based on student need/essentials skills (Math, ELA, study hall, enrichment, 1-1 counseling).

#### **Year Two 2010-2011**

- Focus for 9<sup>th</sup>&10<sup>th</sup> Grade: Numeracy/Literacy
  - Semester 1: Placement of students determined by two or more fails in core classes.
  - Students enter/exit determined by every 4 weeks progress report cards.
  - Weekly contract students monitored through advisory.
  - Mandatory Homework Hall after school monitored by volunteered credentialed teacher.
  - Semester 2: Placement of students determined by performance on Common Formative Assessments assessing specific skills/essential standards.
  - Students enter/exit determined biweekly by core teachers recommendations.
  - No contract for students receiving intervention.

- Study Hall mandatory for students with missing assignments. Study Hall to be held during Advisory by the same teacher.
- Enrichment classes are thematic: myth buster, dance, physical education, etc.

#### Year Three 2011-2012

- Focus for 9<sup>th</sup>&10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Grade: Numeracy/Literacy
  - First rotation is determined by diagnostic assessment in Math & English **only**.
  - First ELA & Math intervention last for duration of 4 weeks.
  - Additional intervention courses added on as-need basis.
  - Department held study halls as needed for weekly “catch-up” sessions during Wednesday and Thursday Libra Time.
  - Contract issued in Tier 3: Adopt a student (one-on-one) for mentoring sessions.
  - Rigorous enrichment sessions based on 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills.
  - Teacher plans curriculum for 4 sessions (2 weeks) and students rotate.

LIBRA’s commitment to supporting its students is demonstrated by the fact that we offer 99% of our Intervention and Enrichment sessions “between- the- bells” thereby guaranteeing that our students attend their determined sessions. Our innovative bell schedule allows for LIBRA TIME; a forty-minute 3 days per week allotment of instructional time wherein students are grouped for Advisory on Tuesdays, and Intervention/Enrichment on Wednesdays/Thursdays.

In much the same vein as our approach to academic excellence, LIBRA also approaches student behavior utilizing the Problem-Solving Process. This year, LIBRA *Academy* formed its first *Discipline Team*, comprised of teachers, students, and parents, to promote clear expectations for positive discipline in the classroom, design processes and procedures for documenting behavioral referrals and actions taken, and implementing progressive consequences for infractions to our policies. To date, the Discipline Team created a LIBRA *Academy* student/parent behavior brochure, designed our school-wide tardy policy and dress code, and provided staff with assistance with classroom management strategies.

**c. Social and Emotional Needs:** Describe the programs, resources, and services that the school will provide in order to meet the social and emotional needs of the students we serve.

LIBRA’s commitment to educating the “whole-child” through our Advisory and Intervention programs is evidence that we have carefully thought out and put into practice the programs and resources we feel meet the needs of the students in our community. Because our school environment is very personal and every child is known by several adults, our students feel a certain confidence and trust with staff members on campus. Our students welcome the fact that they can seek assistance and guidance from any number of adults throughout the day. Nurturing this trusting, personal environment is one of the most valuable resources we have put into practice at LIBRA *Academy*. We know this because our students and parents let us know; through surveys, conversations, meeting attendance, and interviews our students and parents remind us that this aspect of LIBRA makes it a socially and emotionally safe place for them.

When the situation necessitates, our staff also makes use of resources and services from school psychologists, social workers, pupil and student attendance coordinators, threat assessment teams,

counseling referrals, and other agencies when our students and or their families require more intensive support.

**d. College and Career Readiness:** Describe the specific programs the school will provide to expose students to college and career opportunities.

LIBRA *Academy's* mission and vision for its students speaks to our commitment in adequately preparing them for the college and career of their choice. Our rigorous, A-G curriculum, coupled with the personalized support to reach academic excellence through our multi-faceted Advisory/Intervention program, ensures that LIBRA *Academy* holds itself accountable to its commitment in preparing our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century endeavors they choose to engage in.

To begin this college and career preparation, LIBRA dedicates much of its 8<sup>th</sup> grade articulation and recruitment presentations to potential students and parents disseminating information on the importance of college/career and how we will assist students in making informed choices. We provide middle school parents/students with informational brochures and Q & A sessions with specific services that LIBRA commits to provide to their child.

Some of the services and support that LIBRA provides to all its students include: regular appointments and personalized IGP planning sessions with the academic counselor; 9<sup>th</sup> grade Career Development elective course that utilizes a career/college planning curriculum; bi-annual field trips to local community/state college campuses for each grade level; guest speakers from various universities; parent information workshops on college awareness and financial aide; PSAT mandatory test-taking for all LIBRA 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> graders; scholarship information disseminated through Advisory course and Enrichment.

LIBRA *Academy* promotes the importance of college/career readiness throughout its daily practices and permeates throughout its culture. Teachers incorporate personal experiences on college/career choices as part of their instruction; our classroom walls are lined with a parade of college pennants as visual reminders for students; college spirit day (t-shirts) is a favorite school spirit activity. Attending college after high school isn't negotiated at LIBRA; it's the expectation.

LIBRA *Academy* also offers an Online Learning Center where students are encouraged to participate in accelerated courses. In addition to taking online courses, LIBRA promotes taking community college courses. Students are exposed to the local community colleges and the courses offered by the institution every semester. Students at LIBRA *Academy* receive individual assistance with concurrent enrollment forms and assistance in making them highly competitive to all four year universities.

Students are encourage to take interest inventories to assist them in getting suggestions about majors, careers, and colleges that might be a good fit for them. Students at Libra are also exposed to participate in enrichment summer programs, ranging from internships to summer long stays at various university campus. Specific information to the various programs is provided by the academic counselor.

**e. School Calendar/Schedule:** Describe the school calendar and daily schedule.

Research has indicated that one of the best predictor of student achievement is teacher quality and capacity (Darling-Hammond, L. Teacher Quality and Student Achievement. Education policy Analysis Archives, North America, 8, Jan. 2000). Other studies have shown that collaboration between teachers is a powerful tool for professional growth and can be major catalyst of school improvement by providing “opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2004). Professional learning communities: Professional development strategies that improve instruction. Retrieved March 22, 2007, from <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/ProfLearning.pdf0>). These findings were the primary driving force behind the design of LIBRA *Academy's* weekly schedule.

LIBRA's schedule allows for weekly professional development and planning sessions that provide our small staff with the time and opportunity to collaborate on instructional and program design. In addition to the weekly collaboration and planning sessions our staff has on Mondays, LIBRA's commitment to staff collaboration and professional learning communities has led to purposeful scheduling that features common conference periods for curriculum partners. Our schedule and matrix allows for teachers to have common-planning time at their avail, for a maximum of 4 days per week. This common-planning time is critical for professional learning communities to engage in curriculum and assessment design and/or modifications, student data analysis and the sharing of best instruct practices.

The other major factor in the design of LIBRA's weekly schedule was the desire to blend the academic benefits of block scheduling with the consistency offered by the traditional 6-period, 2 semester course schedule. LIBRA *Academy* has been operating on a modified block or hybrid version of a 60/90 minute weekly schedule on A-track of the Concept 6 calendar since we opened our doors to students in 2009. The longer blocks of time allowed in our schedule provide a flexible and interactive classroom environment along with more opportunities for using varied and interactive teaching methods. Teachers are able to incorporate extended explorations, labs, and projects during class. In addition the daily contact with fewer students provides teachers the opportunity to personalize the curriculum to better fit the needs of his/her students while providing our students with the same in-class instructional minutes they would receive in a traditional 6-period course schedule on a Concept 6 calendar (300 weekly minutes per core class, 120 total minutes for advisory/enrichment/intervention).

In order to maximize instructional time and ensure that time remains a factor that supports student learning we have chosen to experiment with various versions of our schedule and modify it repeatedly to accommodate the needs of our students and our staff. The first version of our current schedule (attachment VI: Bell Schedule 1) mixed 60 and 90-minute blocks on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It had a student start time of 7:45 am to provide the staff with a 30-minute morning meeting 4 days a week and a 100 minute professional development session in the mornings on Wednesdays (student start time 9:15 am). It also provided students with both a nutrition and lunch break and an advisory session in the morning three days a week. After operating under the original schedule for one semester we found that the timing of the nutrition and lunch break was disruptive to student learning and that students were simply not hungry during lunch if offered a nutrition meal 60-90 minutes before their lunch. In order to minimize waste during lunch we chose to eliminate the nutrition break during the school day and offer a breakfast meal instead.

The next major modification to our schedule came in the Spring of 2011 (attachment VII: Bell Schedule 2) when we chose to have all classes meet consistently for 60 minutes on Mondays and Fridays, shifted to three midweek Advisory/Intervention sessions at the end of the day, and scheduled our professional development sessions for Monday afternoons. The change allowed our staff to better prepare for the events of the week by meeting at the beginning of the week. The shift to advisory and enrichment/intervention sessions at the end of the day allowed students to participate in the sports program at Huntington Park High School without students missing valuable class time in core subjects. It also allowed students requiring more time during intervention to remain a few minutes after school to receive additional assistance.

As our school has continued to increase in population it has become necessary to offer students an additional break during the school day to visit the bathroom facilities. Our current version of the course schedule (attachment VIII: Current Bell Schedule) incorporates a 15-minute student break in which no meals are served. The order of our courses has also changed to offer more consistency in meeting times during the week. Students enrolled in the special education program and requiring additional support or services by a support specialist can do so during blocks A and B. Students enrolled in sports programs are offered physical education for block F and are dismissed to attend practice and games with teacher approval.

**f. Policies:** Describe the school's policies as they relate to retention, graduation, and student behavior.

Although we at LIBRA *Academy* acknowledge the pilot school autonomies over our program, we also recognize that many Education Code, State, and District policies are non-negotiable for ensuring for the safety, well-being, and future educational endeavors of our students. To that end, LIBRA *Academy* continues to adhere to the graduation and retention policies and requirements as set forth by the LAUSD. As mentioned earlier, we intend to pursue innovative options for course electives that meet the A-G requirements, but may be different than what the District currently recommends in the areas of performing/visual/tech arts. We will adhere to the LAUSD required graduation credits (230) until we obtain full pilot autonomies and our own CDS code, separate from Huntington Park High School. We understand that the State requirement for graduation credits is lower, at 130 credits. We do have plans to begin a deep dialogue with all stakeholders, regarding any possible changes we may pursue in graduation credit requirements, including exploring student culminating projects/exhibitions as a requirement. LIBRA *Academy* will continue to adhere to all District policies regarding suspensions, expulsions, opportunity transfers, and positive progressive discipline (attachment IX: Discipline Brochure).



## **B-5. Parent and Community Engagement**

### **a. Background:** Describe the community we serve.

LIBRA *Academy* is located in the city of Huntington Park, CA on the northeast corner of the campus of Huntington Park HS, Local District 6. LIBRA's classrooms are exclusively housed in portable bungalows whose removal by the District is immanent.

The city of Huntington Park is a very densely populated community comprised of over 60,000 residents occupying a mere three miles. The residents of Huntington Park are primarily Spanish-speaking immigrants whose median income is projected at \$23,000 below the median household income for the State of California. Recent estimates indicate that 15,000 HP residents live below the poverty line, with approximately 1 in 5 residents being unemployed. Over 90% of the residents in Huntington Park speak Spanish as their primary language at home. Recent data also indicates that approximately 55% of our students' parents are *non-high school* graduates, only 25% of our students' parents graduated from high school, and a mere 6% of our students' parents actually attained a college diploma.

One of the strengths of the community members in Huntington Park is their bi-cultural/bilingualism. Parents, students, and community members bring the gift of appreciation and empathy of diversity from the two cultures they navigate through simultaneously. The staff at LIBRA *Academy* capitalizes on the biculturalism/bilingualism of our students each day by providing them with ample opportunities to use their language in finding cognates, word analysis and roots as they develop their fluency in both languages. LIBRA explicitly seeks ways for our students to use their gift of biculturalism to promote their deep analysis and synthesis of information to understand various points of view and develop multiple perspectives. This skill is vital in assisting our students in accepting and empathizing with all types of diversity; whether it be cultural or physical.

### **b. Strategies:** Describe our team's history and experience serving this or a similar community.

Parents and other family members are our students' first teachers and advocates. Family partnerships are crucial to students' success. They will be involved with every aspect of our school program. Not only do our parents sit on the Governing Board, but LIBRA *Academy* maintains an open door policy. Parents are solicited for input to our instructional program through observations, surveys, conferences, and open houses, and the monthly *Coffee with the Principal* meetings. In addition, parents are encouraged to volunteer on campus or assist in classes. Parents will always remain visible partners on our campus.

Families are important to LIBRA *Academy* and as mentioned before will be included in all aspects of the school. LIBRA welcomes parental input and especially encourages participation with our Advisory Program. One component of our 9<sup>th</sup> grade students' advisory class provides a DVD and booklet to be taken home that involves "family talk" at home around topics the students are learning about in Advisory.

Parent conferences are held in a timely manner and parents are welcome to volunteer at the school and attend classes with their child. If parents cannot attend the Parent Conference events, they make individual appointments with each teacher.

We want to support family learning in which we have literacy or continuing education programs to



provide useful services to families and at the same time welcome them into the school community. Parents who attend activities at the school get to know teachers and faculty and feel more comfortable discussing their child's education and needs.

## **THEORY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Successful schools do not operate in isolation. They build connections to families and communities as a way to strengthen relationships in support of children and as a way to better understand students so that teaching can be tailored to them as individuals.

Reaching out to families in a meaningful way is not always easy. It requires time perseverance to establish the sustained relationships with parents that will lead first to mutual understanding and then to cooperation on behalf of children.

At LIBRA *Academy*, we understand that the education of young people is a partnership between the school, home, and community. We will make every effort to involve our community stakeholders in meaningful ways for the benefit of our students. In order to foster a collaborative partnership with our parents, LIBRA subscribes to the following essential characteristics of family involvement:

- ❖ We understand the cultural backgrounds of our students and the unique challenges they experience;
- ❖ We communicate clearly and respectfully and demonstrate a genuine interest in their child;
- ❖ We conduct meetings that create sense teamwork between the parents and the school.

LIBRA *Academy* believes that the vital first step in developing a positive and productive relationship with our parents and community is to maintain regular communication. At LIBRA, we utilize various resources to communicate our program to our stakeholders. Among the forms of communication we use are:

- Newsletters
- Monthly calendar mailing and announcement flyers
- Coffee with the Principal monthly meetings
- Website
- Connect-Ed phone messages
- Personal phone calls
- Periodic home visits
- Pamphlets/brochures
- Parent workshops/meetings/assemblies

LIBRA *Academy* has been very successful in our ability to include parental input in meaningful ways into our school. We acknowledge that our parents have made the choice to enroll their child with us; therefore, we fully understand that our parents are vital clients and we must take into consideration their suggestions and needs to the optimal degree possible.

We have an extremely participatory and active group of parents who consistently attend meetings, volunteer for student activities, provide donations of goods, services ideas and valuable perspectives on how we are managing our school. Parent surveys are conducted each semester so our staff can reflect and make modifications as necessary. We have made it a priority at LIBRA to always appropriately greet parents and make sure we accommodate their requests for conferences

with teachers and our counselor, when the time is convenient for them. The principal solicits input from parents regularly at her monthly *Coffee with the Principal* meetings and inquires as to how we can make our environment for parents as pleasant as possible.

**c. Key Community Partnerships:** Discuss the specific ways in which community members will be included in the ongoing success of the school.

Community partners such as non-profit organizations, local businesses, other schools, universities, and churches are an integral part of our school plan. Community partners will be solicited to provide LIBRA *Academy* with assistance and services to ensure our students are college and career ready. Although we recognize the importance of building these partnerships to assist us in the ongoing success of our school, this task has been our weakest and least successful in the 2 ½ years we've been in implementation. While our vision is clear as to what types of partnerships we desire such as relevant internships for students, job shadowing opportunities, and dual enrollment at local community colleges, the task of actually locating and beginning the relationship is something we have not been able to dedicate time or resources to accomplishing. Between curriculum planning, lesson designing, and ensuring the day-to-day operations of school run smoothly, it has been difficult to take on this important task in earnest. To strengthen this weak link in our program, we have discussed possible ways to allocate time and compensation for 2 of our staff members who are willing to begin initial steps this summer. Our grade-level counselor, who is new to our staff this year, also brings fresh ideas and a network of potential college/career partners.

This not to say LIBRA has not begun to extend itself into the Huntington Park community; on the contrary. Partners we have already acquired who have provided not only services but also assistance with donations and networking are:

- Pepperdine University (provided student –teacher interns)
- Huntington Park Community Women's Club: provides network into the community for advertising, scholarship opportunities, parent training, student volunteer opportunities
- Alta-Med: provides health/parenting awareness sessions
- Planned Parenthood: Parent-run awareness sessions on health/domestic issues
- Shakey's Pizza: provides fundraising opportunities to the school

### CATEGORY THREE: Leadership that Supports High Academic Achievement for Students and Staff

#### B-6. School Governance and Oversight

**a. School type:** Briefly explain the rationale for applying to operate your school as a pilot model.

We at LIBRA *Academy* will continue to operate as a Pilot School. Our rationale for this decision is based on a collaborative model of leadership that shares authority among the leadership team, students and community. This leadership model foundationally exhibits equity and access on all levels of intellectual growth as demonstrated in curriculum choices, flexible scheduling, teaching practice and learning opportunities that maximize student growth potential.

We use our governance autonomy to facilitate the development of a positive infrastructure that permits and supports learning to the maximum degree possible. Governance autonomy encourages all voices of our school community to participate in cooperative dialogue that moves the school toward the innovative implementation of effective programs. Examples include:

- **Data** informs instruction- students that are far below basic in Math are intentionally scheduled into Math Labs that provide basic skill support. Students who are advanced and motivated enroll in college classes
- **Accountability** and Leadership Roles are shared among staff and our Principal utilizes the input of all stakeholders: students, community, parents and teachers to enhance the educational environment.
- **Maintaining** our school mission and assist with adjustments to programs that support it
- **Principal Selection, Supervision and Evaluation**- the board and chairperson develop a job description, evaluation tool and process that are submitted to the Superintendent for Final approval. Various surveys and questionnaires are given to students, parents and teachers and reflection of Principal is valued

**b. School Level Committees:** Describe the decision-making bodies and general areas of responsibility for each body that will exist in the school. Detail how your school governance structure allows for a real and meaningful impact on school decision-making. Describe the process for gaining input from all stakeholder groups in making key decisions.

**School Level Committees include:**

Decision Making Body	Area(s) of Responsibility	Impact on school decision-making
Governing Board	Set school mission, hire staff, evaluate the principal, approve the budget, approve Single School Plan, approve Categorical Funds, approve Elect- To- Work Agreement, monitor school progress through data, monitor compliance to state and Federal laws, establish relationships with local district director, manage	Set policies for student success Create pathways to higher education and careers that are meaningful to students School community is unified with mission and programs support the mission Distributive Leadership that utilizes the strengths of the teaching team

	school's internal appeals process.	
Intervention Committee	Analyzes data, identifies trends, performs needs assessments, facilitates Response to Intervention discussions school-wide	All students are engaged in the highest quality standards-based instruction that produces graduates that are career ready and/or college bound.
Discipline Committee	Analyzes data, promotes positive approach to discipline school-wide, facilitates info to teacher team and parents, performs needs assessments to inform program	Campus is safe and expectations are supported by informed consequences that create a positive learning environment with limited distractions and more time on task.
Advisory Committee	Analyzes data, promotes the habits of character mind and well-being intentionally through team building activities and curriculum that supports the whole child	Students experience a personalized educational experience and a personal education plan that supports them as individuals and productive community members on their journey toward college and a career.
Professional Learning Community Teams (Grade level/Content)	Analyze data, develop curriculum maps, common formative assessments and projects	Students are held to high academic content standards that encourage inquiry and critical thinking

LIBRA *Academy's* governing structure allows for flexibility with regard to decision-making that considers input from the entire school community in a collaborative manner and meets requirements of state laws related to School Site Councils. Shared ideas are then voted on and implemented as programs at the school. Questionnaires, surveys and stakeholder input at faculty meetings serve as instruments of information that update the council on progress and effectiveness.

**c. Governing Council:** *Pilot schools only.* Describe the composition of the Governing Council and the process for membership selection.

The Governing Council consists of: 3 teachers and 1 alternate, 3 parents, 3 students and 3 community members TBD, the principal.

The process for selection for adults is self nomination or a colleague's nomination. Student selection was based on the election of the ASB Leadership President, Vice President and another student member. The parents were given an opportunity to nominate themselves or be nominated at a meeting called by the Principal. Voting is by ballot and results are announced to the staff. Positions are held for one year with elections annually for all positions. Governing Council training is offered by Local/ Central and/or District Pilot School Committee and is based on the School Site Council model of operation. "All governing boards must have a set of written and approved bylaws that outline the board's membership, election procedures, terms of office, duties, officers, number of meetings per year, decision-making procedures, and methods of communication with the larger school community. Governing boards, which also assume the role of state-mandated school

councils, must meet the requirements of state law on school site councils.” *The Essential Guide to Pilot Schools: Leadership and Governance*.

## **B-7. School Leadership**

**a. Principal Selection:** Describe the criteria for selecting a leader for the school, and explain how these characteristics align with your school’s vision and mission.

The ideal candidate for Principal of LIBRA *Academy* was selected in July of 2009 by a panel of 13 interviewers comprised of design team members, the principal of Huntington Park HS, the LD 6 Director, a community member, and a pilot school facilitator from the Center of Collaborative Education (CCE). The Principal’s job description (see Appendix) was advertised throughout LAUSD; of the 23 candidates who applied, 8 were invited to participate in the interview.

The basic purpose and function of the LIBRA *Academy* principal are:

- A. **Job Purpose:** Serves as the educational leader, chief fiscal officer, and chief administrator of a secondary school and is responsible for the direction of the pilot school’s instructional program, as well as ensuring the pilot school’s mission and vision are at the forefront of all decisions and practices, using the mission to guide the development of goals. The pilot school principal is also responsible for the operation of the school plant and related facilities.
- B. **Functions:** Pilot School principals:
  1. Work closely with the Governing Board to ensure the school stays on track with its mission and goals;
  2. Lead the effort to create a budget, schedule, and staffing pattern that best serves teaching and learning;
  3. Ensure a focus of high academic expectations, challenging curriculum, effective instruction, and support for all students;
  4. Ensure the financial well-being of the school, including responsibility for fundraising;
  5. Mobilize and support teacher leadership through a team and committee structure;
  6. Build strong relationships with teachers, students, families, and community members;
  7. Ensure and advocate for the Pilot School five autonomies of staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and scheduling.

LIBRA *Academy* was granted pilot school status in June 2010 by the Steering Committee of the iDesign Office of LAUSD. The school is located on the campus of Huntington Park HS (8700) in Local District 6. The current principal, Lisa Davis, was hired as the Small School Principal for LIBRA *Academy* on July 7, 2009.

In accordance with the LAUSD Memorandum of Understanding for pilot schools, the LIBRA *Academy* principal will be evaluated annually by the school’s Governing Board, following the guidelines set forth in the pilot school autonomies, and in accordance with the AALA Bargaining Unit agreement. The evaluation criteria of the principal will be aligned to the six dimensions listed in the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSEL). The principal will need to demonstrate experience and knowledge, and growth in the following indicators:

- Analysis

- Staff Development
- Extra-organizational Sensitivity
- Initiative and Innovativeness
- Instructional Leadership
- Judgment and Decisiveness
- Leadership and Influence

One of the first responsibilities of the LIBRA *Academy* Governing Board this year will be to establish the internal process for the principal's evaluation. Relevant data that may be gathered as part of the evaluation process may include: a self-evaluation or assessment by the principal of his/her own performance in relation to the job description and school goals and a collection of other relevant data on student achievement.

### **B-8. Staff Recruitment and Evaluation**

**b. Recruitment and Selection of Teachers:** Describe the criteria the school will use to select teachers.

Staffing autonomy allows for our Selection Committee to select highly qualified teachers motivated to providing an excellent education for students, collaborate with professionals, model student advocacy, and promote life-long learning. The Election-to-Work agreement allows teachers to voluntarily agree to teach at the Pilot School in 1-year increments or the Selection Committee determines the teacher is not a good candidate for the school.

Candidates are interviewed by our Selection Committee utilizing a set of questions with a rubric, and a scenario or in-basket situation they must answer (see Attachment X: Interview Questions). Positions are posted on the LAUSD HR site and announcements are sent to neighboring schools for possible recruits.

**c. Performance Reviews:** Describe the development, evaluation, and support process for teachers, administrators, and other certificated staff.

All certificated personnel will be evaluated yearly based on the newly revised California Standards for the Teaching Profession as recommended by LAUSD and the Framework for Teaching as developed by Charlotte Danielson. LIBRA teachers will continue to develop their understanding of the domains, components, and elements outlined in their *Framework for Teaching* by supporting each other in peer observations, reflections, cognitive coaching, and use of "critical friends" protocols to assist the principal in making appropriate recommendations for guidance, assistance, and future support. Our staff has invested professional development time in establishing a common language of teaching expectations that are shared by the entire staff, thus enriching their professional expertise.

During the first month of the school year each teachers complete a pre-observation initial planning sheet (Stull) listing his/her goal(s) for the year. The goals are chosen from the California Teaching Standards. Each teacher meets with the principal for a pre-observation conference. Formal and informal observations are conducted throughout the year by the administrator and by teachers observing other teachers. A post observation meeting between the teacher and administrator will follow the formal observation. Each semester students will fill out an evaluation form for each teacher.

The following chart provides an example of the staffing pattern at LIBRA *Academy* for the past three years:

Year 1( Inaugural year) 2009	Year 2 (2010)	Year 3 (2011)	Year 4 (2012)
1 Principal	1 FTE PE teacher	1 Math teacher	1 Social Studies teacher
1 Counselor/PE teacher	1 Science teacher	1 ELA teacher	1 FTE Special Education teacher
1 Science Teacher	2 Math teachers	1 Art Teacher	1 Paraprofessional
1 Math teacher	1 ELA teacher		1 ELA/Bilingual Coach-Coordinator
2 Social Studies (both for 9 <sup>th</sup> grade electives)	1 Foreign Language		
1 ELA teacher	1 Life Skills/Health		

*Over the duration of the first 4 years at LIBRA, our teaching staff should reach approximately 18 members reflective of our instructional program needs.*

### STAFFING PATTERNS AND EVALUATION

Teachers at LIBRA *Academy* are also planning to spend collaborative time in their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year creating a peer review and support system that will incorporate the following items:

- Sharing classroom video with teacher feedback
- Peer reviews
- Classroom visits
- Performance Rubric compilation of teacher generated goals and objectives in the following areas: support for student learning, planning and designing instruction, classroom performance, development as a professional and punctuality, attendance and record keeping.

LIBRA *Academy* recruits new staff based on the needs of the students and class offerings.

Prospective teachers must embrace the Mission and Vision of LIBRA *Academy* and Pilot Schools as well as demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

- Content Area or College Major
- Use of Innovative Instructional Strategies
- Differentiated Instruction (ESL, Special Needs students)
- Classroom Management
- Adolescent Psychology and Development



## B-9. Sharing a Campus

### a. Explain how you will ensure all operations run smoothly on-site.

Since LIBRA *Academy* is located on the campus of Huntington Park HS, one of the largest comprehensive 3- track high schools remaining in the District, we are definitely no stranger to the advantages and disadvantages of sharing a facility and coordinating services so that the safety and smooth operation of each group of stakeholders is maintained and respected. Regular and clear communication is essential, if all occupants of the shared space are going to co-exist productively. In all honesty, this endeavor has not been an easy one in the three years we have shared the HPHS campus. That being said, we have turned our mistakes into learning experiences and lessons that will prove to be an asset if we are granted relocation to South Region HS #7.

In terms of the importance of clear and regular communication, LIBRA *Academy* proposes several venues to begin this important task. The chart below is a visual of what the cycle of communication at SRHS #7 might look like:

Type of Communication	Timeline	Persons Involved	Task
Initial Principal/LD Director Meet & Greet	Immediately following the announcement of proposal winners	3 Principals; LD Director and Supt	Begin initial contact; team introductions; expectations for future communication; needs assessment
SRHS#7 Complex Principal Retreat	Summer 3 wks prior to school opening (2 full days)	3 Principals	Continue with needs assessments; introduction to each plan details on school operation protocols, bell schedules, point persons, emergency drills, possible sharing of resources and coordination of services
SRHS#7 3 School Leadership Team Retreat	Summer 1 week prior to opening (1 day)	3 Principals/Leads from each small school	Introductions; team-building; needs assessment; future collaborative on best practices
SRHS #7 Monthly Complex Principal Collaborative	2x per month-1 <sup>st</sup> 3 months of school opening; 1x per month thereafter	3 Principals	Timely coordination of services/resources; pro-active problem-solving; continued needs assessment; professional development on leadership strategies

## C. INTERNAL MANAGEMENT

### C-2. Budget Development: Outline your school's priorities from start-up through year three.

As a pilot school with autonomy over budgeting, LIBRA *Academy* intends to follow the **LAUSD Per Pupil Funding Model** for budgeting for student achievement. We have for the past 2 years, advocated for this funding model; however, we have been unsuccessful to date. Constraints such as having no CDS/location code and QEIA grant inflexibilities have made it impossible for LIBRA to utilize its earned autonomy over budget. It is our desire to be able to utilize the Per Pupil Funding model, as do other pilot schools, beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

In preparation for per pupil funding, LIBRA has made student attendance and enrollment a priority. We understand that per pupil funding is generated primarily on ADA. We agree that this model will assist us in bringing the decisions regarding our budget closest to our School Governing Board, and not the District. Our funding priorities thus far, have been focused on staffing, to maintain class size in ELA and Math to a ratio of 24-1 in order to provide sufficient attention and intervention in those subject areas. We also focused on offering the opportunity for our at risk Algebra students to take a double-block of Algebra 1 with a lab section, in order to provide ample time for pacing, instructional modifications, and personalization.

As ELA and Math support still remain a priority at LIBRA; in year 3 we understood the importance of providing options for our students in high-interest elective courses as well. While staffing these elective courses will remain somewhat of a challenge for a small school, we are unwavering in our commitment to provide our students with a challenging and relevant course sequence that allows them to successfully compete for college acceptance.

The **per pupil model** will afford us the flexibility and autonomy to continue focusing our efforts in class size reduction, intervention opportunities, and course offerings.

Our current categorical budget worksheet is included (Attachment X: Categorical Budget). LIBRA *Academy* will also form a Budget sub-committee to work in collaboration with the principal to develop each year's budget along with necessary processes and protocols for accessing funds.

## APPENDICES

Appendices are Required Sections of the RFP

## Attachments

(Supplemental documents)