

Caprock High School

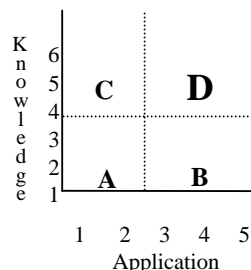
Amarillo, Texas

Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

Personalization
9th Grade Initiative
Use of Data to Drive Instruction
Academic Interventions
Principal Leadership
Focused Professional Development
Special Education, ELL Integration

Rigor/Relevance Framework



By the Numbers

1,750 students
63% minority
16% students with disabilities
7% migrant students
8% English language learners
54% free/reduced lunch
23% mobility rate
93% daily attendance rate
90% graduation rate
AYP met

Executive Summary

Caprock High School is one of four comprehensive high schools in the Amarillo Independent School District in Texas. It has a total staff commitment to personalization through developing caring and positive relationships with all students. This is accompanied by uncompromisingly high expectations and a rigorous and relevant curriculum driven by extensive use of assessment data. The school is dedicated to preparing students to be successful in life after high school.

The curriculum has a mix of core academic and career and technical education classes. The Achievement through Commitment to Education (ACE) Scholarship Program is a unique program at the school. An area foundation guarantees a free college education for any qualifying graduate at either Amarillo College or West Texas A & M University. A special feature of Caprock is the school's commitment to integration of all students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, into its education programs. As a regional center for students with hearing impairments, the school takes great pride in the services provided to students who are deaf. Nine interpreters rotate throughout regular classes daily providing support and assistance.

Caprock is mission-focused with a faculty and staff who have a unity of purpose. The school is best described by its motto — "Miracle on 34th Street" — related to its location in the district. Student enrollment was approximately 1,750 students in the 2005-06 school year. The majority of the students are Hispanic. The beliefs of the staff are articulated in Caprock's mission statement: "Caprock High School will serve as the center of learning in which the students will be provided the opportunity and encouragement to reach their maximum potential as productive citizens of today and tomorrow."

Caprock created a 9th grade initiative to help ensure success for all freshmen. Faculty and administrators designed this program seven years ago with the core belief that they simply will not allow freshmen to fail. Housed in a separate wing of the school, all freshmen are assigned to small learning communities with core teams of teachers. One assistant principal and a counselor are assigned exclusively to the 9th grade. According to teachers in grades 10, 11, and 12, the commitment to freshmen being successful is a major reason for the school's success.

Faculty and administrators accept their roles as "possibility preachers" for all students. Almost without exception, staff members verbalize their high expectations for students frequently, with special emphasis on opportunities after high school. Teachers and upper-class student-mentors provide supportive assistance to freshmen. Strong administrative leadership with high expectations and support for students also exists in a culture of celebration for student and staff success.

The school has a focused professional development initiative, the Caprock Teacher Academy, and numerous academic interventions for students. Teachers use data effectively to influence instruction to ensure academic success. Making adequate yearly progress according to Texas standards, this is a school where "kids come first." It truly is the "Miracle on 34th Street!"

Caprock students are 59% Hispanic, 37% white, 3.4% African American, and approximately .6% Asian or American Indian. Over half of all students qualify for free or reduced price lunch and the mobility rate of the student body is 22.5%. Average daily attendance is 93% and the graduation rate is 90%. Sixteen percent are students with disabilities who have individualized education plans (IEP). The migrant student population is approximately 100 and about the same number of students are served in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. The school has students who are immigrants who speak 14 different languages. Several years ago the faculty challenge was to work with native Spanish-speaking students and help them with their English. Now, the challenges have increased drastically. Every teacher knows that he or she will have ESL students in nearly every class and that special efforts will need to occur with these students. The result is that a special Caprock Teacher Academy initiative in 2005-06 was training in the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), intended to improve the achievement of second language learners. While 16% of the students are categorized as having a disability, Caprock accepts no excuse for all students not achieving at a high level. There is a special commitment to a co-teaching, inclusion model.

Average class size in core academic courses ranges from 20 to 30 students. However, Caprock is committed to 9th grade success and the average class size for freshman core classes is 18 to 20 students. As a result, some classes in grades 10, 11, and 12 are required to have larger enrollments of 30 to 35 students. In addition, a special feature of the demographics is the stability of the faculty. Recognized as the district's most challenging high school, Caprock in many ways is also the most successful. With the exception of new staff members added because of enrollment increases, the turnover of certified teachers between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years was one teacher and this was to replace a teacher who retired. Even when the opportunity presents itself to transfer to a different high school, very few teachers are interested in leaving this unique culture.

1. School Culture

Students learn because of their teachers at Caprock. The culture features an uncompromising commitment to excellence. There is universal belief among faculty members that students can and will learn and that teachers are responsible for making it happen. Both students and teachers indicate that a vital resource for the school is "each other." There is a significant amount of mutual respect and a faculty that truly enjoys working together on behalf of students' success.

The principal and the administrative team provide strong support and view themselves as "barrier removers and resource providers." Teachers believe that their students "love this high school." Student self-esteem is based upon academic achievement, with data used extensively to influence the instructional program. The entire faculty is dedicated to a culture of continuous improvement with a commitment to understand the culture of the students and the community in which they live. Staff development initiatives have focused on the critical learning aspects related to the Hispanic culture to help motivate students to excellence. In fact, the principal tours the community during induction activities for new teachers.

The commitment to excellence is particularly celebrated through the programs recognizing the achievements of staff members. Signs throughout the building recognize the Teacher of the Year, the recent recognition of the principal as Texas Principal of the Year, and numerous other adult and student achievements. The "Longhorn Legends" program was started in 1983 when the school celebrated its 20th anniversary. Faculty honored teachers who had taught at Caprock for 20 years. This tradition continues today and each year faculty members are inducted into the "Longhorn Legend Society" with a special celebration, a bound book of letters and pictures from staff members congratulating accomplishments and recognizing special moments, and a jacket with the Longhorn Legend emblem on it. Currently CHS has 47 teachers with 20 or more years of experience who are members of the society. These teachers oversee the selection of Distinguished Alumni – the Caprock hall of fame.

"Mrs. Caprock," the social studies department chairperson with 32 years of experience at Caprock and 43 years total, oversees many of the faculty recognition programs. Begun in 1999, the "Top of the Rock" program features faculty members nominating peers. The building leadership team then

votes, and those selected receive special awards, dinners, and an end-of-the-year luncheon. In addition, an emotional end-of-the-year celebration includes the top 12 graduating seniors selecting the teacher who made the most difference in their lives. This teacher, who could be a pre-high school instructor, receives a plaque, a letter from the senior, and attends a special luncheon. A new faculty recognition initiative is the “High Five” Program. Any adult who wants to recognize the achievement of another adult simply writes the reason why the honoree should be recognized on a hand-shaped paper, places it in a box, and the nominated staff member receives special recognition. Two of Caprock’s current teachers have been recognized as district and regional teachers of the year.

The entire school family of students and adults embraces students with special needs. Students with severe disabilities populate many regular curriculum classes and receive support as needed from staff members and students. The commitment to excellence also features an on-campus daycare program for infants and children of high school students. The administration is proud that this number has decreased from a high of 100 high school girls pregnant or with infant children several years ago to approximately 70 at the current time. The school is committed to having the mothers receive a high school diploma and giving the infants access to appropriate care.

Teachers and administrators have high expectations for the achievement of all students and make every effort to avoid student failure. The statement of purpose in the faculty handbook makes it clear that all employees are vital to the success of students, regardless of the position they hold. “We need to constantly be reminded that Caprock High School has only one reason to exist. That is to provide the very best education possible for our students.” The school’s purpose statement emphasizes that the student is the most important person in the school. “The student is to be looked upon as the recipient of the very best that professional teachers have to offer. All of our efforts must be student-centered. Success can only be measured through the success of our students.”

Principal Becky Harrison sums up the commitment to excellence by saying, “Our support systems are the glue that makes all of this work. If a student fails or drops out of school, we have not done our job. The moms and dads are sending us the best they have. They are not keeping their gifted kids at home. It’s our job to educate them.”

2. Core Academic Learning

Students are achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) in all areas defined by the state-mandated testing program in Texas. In grade 10, Caprock’s students exceed comparable schools in achievement in science. State data indicates that more of Caprock’s students are meeting or exceeding state standards as they proceed through high school. Only 1% of students with severe disabilities are exempted from the normal state testing program because of Caprock’s belief that students will not be exempt from real-world challenges.

Achievement is driven by the required six-week formative assessments administered in all core academic subjects. The assessment initiative is closely monitored by the principal and department heads and is a key factor for high student achievement.

Comparing the percentage of students between 2004 and 2005 who achieved Commended status on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS):

- English language arts increased from 4% to 8%
- Math from 5% to 6%
- Science from 1% to 3%
- Social studies from 12% to 18%.

Other Caprock commitments to high levels of student core learning include:

- All Career and Technical Education (CTE) and elective teachers are required to cross-walk the state standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, TEKS) to their classes. ALL teachers are required to construct and teach lessons that help students achieve core competency on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). CTE teachers can “plug” their curriculum into a Texas Region IV software program to connect with the TEKS. For many teachers, this has been eye-opening. A comment from the building trades instructor is typical – “I did not know that I taught English language arts skills.”
- In 9th grade, the core goal is for all freshmen to have the required number of credits to academically “graduate” to the 10th grade and to be prepared for proficiency on the TAKS. In 1999, 25% of all freshmen were retained in 9th grade. In 2006 the number is 2%, and this is deemed unacceptable.
- The 9th grade course passing rate has improved from 53% in 1999 to 90% in 2006.
- The graduation rate has improved from 70% in 1999 to 90% in 2006.
- The percent of 11th graders who met or exceeded TAKS requirements in 2005 and compared to 2002 was: math 68% (62%), English language arts 82% (67%), science 68% (64%), social studies 91% (no change).
- Even more impressive is the improvement of special education students from 2002 to 2005 on the same TAKS tests administered to regular education students: math 22% to 58%, English language arts 20% to 76%, science 50% to 63%, social studies 79% to 81%.
- Special efforts are made to insure that all seniors pass the TAKS competency in math. Without this, a regular diploma is not possible and the student loses the honor of walking across the stage at graduation, a major event since many Caprock students are first-generation high school graduates. Seniors who are TAKS math deficient are enrolled in a 5 week intensive math class prior to the spring TAKS testing. Overseen by the associate principal, a math teacher is given a paid overload assignment and, with teacher permission (100% granted), students are taken out of one class for this intense math. Community business partners also tutor students after school. A similar program exists for geometry “bubble kids” who are in danger of not passing the TAKS.
- A similar science initiative is coordinated by an assistant principal. This begins early in the 9th grade year when all students who failed a science class or science TAKS in 8th grade are identified. During the first 6 weeks of the year there is an intensive after-school science remediation program. For upper-class students deficient in science, there is a special “CSI Caprock” thematic approach. In a partnership with higher education, Caprock students visit Amarillo College and receive special motivation from college students and teachers. College students also tutor at Caprock.

3. Stretch Learning

The Achievement through Commitment to Education (ACE) Scholarship Program is a special achievement feature of the school. Founded at a sister school with four community partners in 1994, ACE was established at Caprock in 2002. An area foundation has been established which guarantees a free college education for any qualifying Caprock graduate at Amarillo College or West Texas A & M University. ACE requires high school students and their parents to pledge annually to maintain an 80% G.P.A., a 95% attendance record, and appropriate behavior while attending high school. The ACE coordinator works with teachers and students in a personalized setting to prepare students for education beyond high school.

Once in college, graduates must maintain a 2.0 G.P.A. each semester in nine or more hours of classes. The ACE scholarship funds are “last money in.” In other words, Caprock staff members help students apply for scholarships and financial aid and ACE funds then pay for everything else that is not

covered. The importance of the ACE Scholarship Program in terms of supporting and encouraging student achievement cannot be overemphasized. The first ACE graduating class of approximately 30 students occurred in May 2005. However, this is only the beginning: nearly 1200 of the 1,750 students at Caprock have pledged on a yearly basis to meet the requirements of ACE. For the graduating class of 2006, 182 of the 307 graduates are ACE eligible. Nearly 600 freshmen and their parents have signed the ACE pledge.

Since the special freshman initiative was started seven years ago, Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment has increased by 45%. In addition, staff gives credit to the 9th grade initiative for tripling the enrollment in dual-credit college classes by juniors and seniors. During 2005-06, 336 hours of dual credit college hours were earned by students.

A strong vertical articulation program with the feeder middle school allows native Spanish speakers to enroll in Spanish 1 and 2 in middle school and sit for AP exams. The result is that these students can complete 4 more years of Spanish in high school and earn up to 12 dual credit college hours. Additional ways that Caprock stretches students include:

- Every student has a Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) coordinated by his/her counselor.
- Counselors follow a special model to insure success for at-risk students. Known as INRE (identify, notify, remediation, evaluate), the model continuously loops for students in need.
- Every teacher has daily access to TRIAND, a district software program that gives immediate access to past student performance on any TEK/TAKS.
- Through vertical teaming with Amarillo College, 9th graders through college sophomores follow a common standard in writing research papers.
- High school seniors are required to write an English research paper based upon the essential questions of great philosophers. Using higher order thinking skills, students connect such authors as Dante, Plato, and Shakespeare to the real world of today.
- Nearly 75% of all CTE classes taught at Caprock are eligible for dual credit at Amarillo College. This is important since over 60% of Caprock students enroll in at least one CTE class.
- Caprock has model CTE programs in building trades, agriculture, criminal justice, drafting, machining, technology, child care, and culinary arts. New in 2005-06 is a community mentor and tutoring program whereby 7 businesses provide dozens of tutors for Caprock students on a weekly basis.
- The school year is extended by two weeks for those students needing more time and this is followed by a well-attended summer school session.
- Thirteen job readiness partnerships exist with businesses throughout the community.

4. Student Engagement

The teachers and administrators understand that student engagement is a learning process through which adults help students assess their talents and aspirations, plan a pathway towards their own purposes, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides. Caprock's educators understand that engagement is more than building close relationships with students.

The 9th grade initiative is a model of high expectations and personalization. An impressive offering of elective classes supports the core academic program, with over 60% of the student body enrolled in at least one career and technical education class. There is a fundamental adult belief that all students, with time and support, can and will learn, and when they do not numerous academic intervention strategies will be applied. A sampling of academic interventions that engage students include the following:

- Nova NET Classes are computer-based online learning programs in the computer lab that provide over 70 students a year with an educational setting alternative to the regular classroom, a much smaller class size, and support from a trained lab facilitator. The lab is used during scheduled periods, before or after school, and during the summer. All Nova NET Classes have been aligned with Texas standards and the high-stakes mandated testing program. This support program serves as a credit-recovery vehicle for at-risk students, improves students' basic skills, and assists students in successfully completing the state testing program.
- Saturday school is the only way for students to receive credit for classes in which they have had numerous absences. It meets for 3 hours and students are required to bring materials that need to be completed. Teachers also give students additional assignments.
- The optional extended-year program consists of classes taught before and after school to help students obtain credit for classes they have not passed the previous semester. Credit recovery initiatives occur every 6 weeks and at the end of each semester.
- The district's at-risk program is a computer-based program to help counselors and administrators monitor progress of students needing extra help in academics, testing, or family life.
- Extra tutorial support is available to students before and after school and during the entire school day as needed. Tutoring is both mandatory and voluntary for students, depending upon need. A special math teacher is available in the library at all times during the school day for students who need extra help, and especially for those who need structured math assignments with a Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills focus.
- North Heights Alternative School is designed for students with unique circumstances. Classes are available in the four core subject areas and some elective topics. This program includes a long-term alternative education program for students who have committed serious illegal offenses at their regular school campus. Students are usually concurrently enrolled at their home campus and may take a portion of their academic courses at North Heights or they may attend all classes there.
- A special effort is made to serve students qualifying under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Not a special education program, eligible students are those with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits learning. Coordinated by a guidance counselor, staff members or parents may refer a student to this initiative at any time. A special committee of a counselor, administrator, and teachers then determines eligibility. Unique to this effort is the extensive communication among teachers, counselors, and parents of eligible students.
- Funded by a state grant for science achievement, the Plato science lab allows credit recovery, remediation, and enrichment in the sciences.
- One of the 9th grade English teachers publishes a student-written book with each of his classes and each class also publishes a class newsletter

Extracurricular and co-curricular activities also add extensively to student engagement. An impressive new organization is the Spoken Word Poetry Group of 20 students who meet for 45 minutes, three mornings a week with two volunteer English teachers. Initiated because of student interest and teacher motivation in original "SLAM" poetry, the students write poetry and present it at community bookstores or open forums three Friday nights a month. Many of the very creative but shy students have found a new voice in demonstrating their interest in the arts.

There is a comprehensive program of interscholastic athletic activities for girls and boys. The girls wrestling team has earned state championships 5 out of the past 7 years and were the 2000 national champions. The boys wrestling team has also been successful. The highly respected coach of the wrestling teams, who is also a social studies teacher and a person who is deaf, is described by his wrestlers as a teacher who teaches life lessons. "He is always reading a new book and sharing ideas with us."

Caprock is an example of a sports program where the philosophy of the athletic director and coach is that, “Winning will pass. Our coaches teach the values that will last for life.” Although they may not always be successful in terms of wins and losses, students speak passionately about the coaches and their commitment to student academic success. Data indicates that sports successes are increasing as academic achievement also increases. Participation in extracurricular activities has doubled in the past 5 years because students are more likely to be academically eligible. Music also has a place at Caprock. The orchestra has earned the top award in state competition each of the past 6 years.

Several unique and engaging extracurricular opportunities are: Adopt a Fish (45 juniors and seniors who mentor freshmen); Longhorn Amigos (15 to 20 students who teach drug prevention lessons in the elementary schools); and PALS (an elementary student mentoring program). Notable is the Americorp Program, an elective class and extracurricular program in which students provide tutoring and mentoring services at feeder elementary schools, receive a monthly payment of \$500, and an \$1,800 scholarship for college. Americorp has been cited for changing the lives of many students by motivating them to attend college and potentially be teachers. In addition, the on-campus daycare for teen parents is commendable.

Other examples of student engagement include:

- Teachers are required to conduct four 30-minute student tutorials each week. These can occur before, during or after school or during lunch.
- In 1999, 57% of 9th graders attended school 90% of the time. In 2006 it was 93%.
- A structured pyramid of academic interventions is followed for all 9th grade students.
- Students are granted foreign language credit for American Sign Language classes. More than 10 sections were offered in 2005-06. These non-hearing-impaired students present an impressive performance at graduation.

5. Personal Skill Development

Although there is no formal character education program, guiding principles direct the behavior of adults and students. Students say that character education is “how our teachers do business.” They claim that nearly all teachers integrate character lessons in the curriculum, serve as positive role models, and talk and listen to students frequently. It is typical for 30 or more students to gravitate to the classroom of several Caprock educators every morning forty-five minutes before school begins to “talk and share.” Impressively, students exhibit good manners; frequently say good morning, please and thank you; open doors for adults; pick up litter on the floor; avoid dishonesty; and demonstrate responsibility.

Caprock is a safe, civil, and orderly high school. During passing time, lunch, before, and after school, students display respect and dignity towards each other and adults. Fights are unusual, and there is little evidence of vandalism or graffiti. The school has a school resource police officer, several security/safety staff members, and a person on staff that serves as a drug prevention specialist. Student organizations focus on drug prevention, including mentoring in the elementary schools. Students report that drug issues, although present, are not serious because attention is focused on student achievement.

There is a strong, no-tolerance policy towards violence and drugs. Perpetrators are arrested and suspended immediately. The administration has drawn the line and students fully know what expectations exist. An interesting aspect of student personal skill development is how staff handles students who are tardy to class, which was a significant issue in previous years. To solve the problem, teachers without classes were assigned strategic locations in the halls at the start of every period. Students knew that if they were tardy to class, they must report to one of these teachers and sign in before going to class. Appropriate consequences were then assigned to the student. In 2004-05 at the request of teachers, this practice was discontinued because tardiness was no longer a serious issue. Students did respond maturely. Now, every teacher has agreed to handle student tardiness on an individual basis. However, every

educator and every student knows that the former policy could be adopted at any time if tardiness to class once again becomes a serious all school issue.

Other examples of personal skill development include:

- Leadership Amarillo provides community learning opportunities for sophomores and juniors.
- Student leaders serve on an advisory committee to the building adult leadership team.
- Several student leaders are selected to serve on the Superintendent's Forum.
- Caprock has the only National Technical Honor Society in the Amarillo school district.
- Students participate in many community service projects such as: Meals on Wheels, Angel Tree adoptions, blood drives, backpack drive for school supplies for students in Afghanistan, money drives for medical emergencies for students and staff.
- The highly regarded Marine JROTC program has won numerous awards for student leadership.

6. High-quality Curriculum and Instruction

The comprehensive curriculum is closely aligned with the TEKS. Teachers administer an assessment at the end of six weeks, which covers TEKS that are introduced during that six-week period. Teachers address strengths and weaknesses along with instructional strategies to improve student learning. Collaboration is done on a regular basis, and the focus of assessment for learning promotes student growth.

All teachers are committed to a rigorous and relevant education for all students guided by positive relationships between students and teachers and featuring reflective thought. Teachers are passionate about their daily instruction and each lesson begins with bell-work, the objective for the day, the TAKS area being addressed, and an explanation of how students can use what is being taught. The faculty has adopted a school-wide focus on the Rigor/Relevance Framework, with every teacher designing model lessons to teach to Quadrant D. The total professional development initiative starting in 2004-05 was directed towards teaching to Quadrant D, and continued during 2005-06. "Teaching to D" has become part of the educational vocabulary of teachers and administrators at Caprock.

For several years, personalization and relationship building have been priorities at Caprock. The rigor of the program has been increased and during the last two years, an extensive effort has been made towards stronger application or relevance in the daily instructional lessons. Staff has built the necessary foundation. Students who believe their teachers really care and whose teachers explain how learning will be used in the future have a significant advantage when it comes to increasing the rigor and relevance of their work.

A committee of teachers has developed and disseminated a writing guide or handbook. All teachers use this across-the-curriculum approach. In addition, individual teachers, departments, and the school use multiple rubrics. As an example, English students evaluate other students' writing samples using a rubric in order to better understand what good writing looks like. Another example is the culinary arts program. As a demonstration of rigor and relevance, students complete and print an impressive recipe book. Featured are favorite recipes of teachers and students.

Student achievement is celebrated in many ways. Honor rolls are posted, newsletters are sent home, items appear in the newspaper, and banquets and luncheons are held. The school participates in the Superintendent's Scholar Program, which is a district-wide program that recognizes student achievement for those who qualify. To be eligible to receive this recognition, a student has to earn a grade of 95 at the end of semester in five classes in freshman through junior year or a grade of 95 in four classes at the end of the senior year. The district holds an awards recognition program at the end of the year. Caprock supplements this program through the following efforts.

- Providing students with teacher-mentors to strive for this recognition
- Hosting a “cookie” reception each six weeks to recognize students who meet the criteria
- Sponsoring fall and spring luncheons featuring a keynote speaker for qualifying students with parents, school board members, and administrators
- Making scholarship funds available for graduating seniors who have achieved multiple semesters as a Superintendent Scholar.

In addition, teachers celebrate curricular and extracurricular successes on a daily basis by making extensive use of the school’s e-mail system. Brief e-mails are sent to each staff member when students do something worthy of recognition in the classroom or in an extracurricular activity.

The technology program is also impressive. An instructional technology support leader coordinates activities to integrate technology throughout the curriculum. With faculty input, she develops an annual plan for instructional technology integration resulting in a seamless and pervasive application of technology. The principal recognizes that the use of technology begins with administrative modeling and proceeds throughout all levels of the school to the students. There are several wireless computer labs, and all students and staff members have a folder on the school server, which they can access from any computer on campus. Teachers make extensive use of e-mail and online attendance and grade reporting. The principal believes it is her job to level the playing field for low-income students through the use of technology. Students are well prepared to use technology in the real world and are also supported by a modern library/media center and the model student laptop checkout program in the district.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building levels

Caprock educators make extensive use of data for making curriculum and instructional decisions. A six-person testing committee shares all assessment responsibilities so that testing programs are run in a systematic manner. This committee, made up of the principal, the associate principal, counselor, diagnostician, instructional technology support teacher and an alternative strategies coordinator, collaborates each semester to organize required local and state assessments. Each member assumes one or two responsibilities in the organization of the assessments so that the work is shared among members. As a result, this team approach makes testing and assessment run very smoothly.

Core academic departments design six-week formative tests based upon district standards. These are department and teacher-developed assessments in the core academic subject areas based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Results allow teachers to assess instruction and determine how well prepared students are for the TAKS. The principal meets with subject-area teachers every six weeks to identify areas for improvement and individual students needing additional help. Action plans are developed to re-teach and provide additional instruction for students. As a result, actual student test scores on the TAKS are never a surprise. This school-wide approach to the use of data is supported by numerous academic interventions and credit-recovery initiatives.

In addition to the TAKS, the testing committee coordinates the administration of the PSAT to sophomores and juniors, Texas Higher Education Assessment, the ASVAB for juniors, and AP exams in English, math, social studies, science, and foreign languages. The TAKS is a challenging high-stakes test that has recently replaced the less rigorous Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Data indicates that Caprock is making AYP with all subpopulations of students. As AYP standards increase, faculty is committed to increasing students’ success. Staff focuses on using formal and informal data for improving instruction and student achievement and ensuring students are successful on state tests. The process is ongoing with subject teachers and departments studying state and district assessment scores and failure rates to devise action plans. Professional development activities focus on disaggregating data and developing plans to address areas in need of improvement.

An additional noteworthy use of data is the analysis of career and technical education courses to identify content that supports the TEKS. Teacher professional development is provided on integrating

academics and CTE courses including workshops on TAKS requirements and how to support these standards in the career and technical classrooms. Approximately 75% of the CTE courses in the 11th and 12th grades are eligible for dual-credit with Amarillo College. Special college placement tests are also offered on campus in cooperation with Amarillo College.

8. Transitions

Ensuring success for 9th graders is a vital component of the organizational structure. Initially funded through a grant from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the 9th grade initiative addresses issues identified through a comprehensive needs assessment. Led and supported by an assistant principal and a counselor, the initiative also has a curriculum specialist who provides data and assessment assistance. Having completed its seventh full year, students in the class of 2006 were the third set of graduates who started in the 9th grade initiative.

Freshmen are housed in a separate building and assigned a freshman-only lunch period to segregate them from upper-class students and to develop successful behaviors. Designating an assistant principal and counselor to the program ensures that all issues are dealt with consistently. Also, both of these individuals know students on a personal basis, giving the students a feeling of belonging and the comfort of knowing they have advocates who believe in them. The curriculum specialist and an attendance clerk also work directly with freshmen, which provides data so that needs are addressed and that the program is accountable.

All 9th grade students are assigned to one of five teams, each consisting of a math, science, social studies, and English teacher. Each team has about 90 first-time freshmen representing a cross section of the class. Teaching staff is allocated to make freshman class size limited to 20. Teachers in grades 10, 11, and 12 strongly endorse this and are willing to take extra students in advanced classes because they know success during the 9th grade year is crucial. Teachers on each 9th grade team share a common planning period and occupy rooms in the same building. This small learning community facilitates individual mentoring and tutoring opportunities for students. Weekly team meetings during a common planning period allow the core teachers, assistant principal, counselor, and curriculum specialist to schedule time to discuss student issues, plan activities, and develop lesson plans. Parent conferences are also scheduled during this time to allow core teachers as well as the assistant principal and counselor to attend.

Success in the early years of the 9th grade initiative surpassed all expectations. Previously, more than one-fourth of the freshmen class did not meet academic standards for promotion to 10th grade. Today, only about 10 freshmen are not promoted and the majority of these have serious ESL issues. Prior to this initiative, only about 57% of 9th graders attended at least 90% of the time. Today, the rate is holding at a consistent 93% attending 90% of the time. Overall course-passing rates have increased from 53% to 98%; there has been a 45% increase in students taking the most rigorous courses after the freshmen year; and the graduation rate is now 90% and improving each year. Several other features of the 9th grade initiative are noteworthy.

- The last six weeks of each semester is “contract time.” Staff members believe that students must be held accountable for learning and contracts with teachers and administrators help to make this possible. Student progress is regularly discussed at the common teacher planning sessions and students are required to set goals for their achievement. Consequences are also described, and the purpose of the contract is to show the student that failing the semester is not acceptable.
- Committed and trained juniors and seniors serve as freshmen mentors through the Adopt a Fish component. These upper-class mentors find time during the school day to spend with their “fish” and are committed to their mentee’s gaining sophomore-year status. Often the upper-class mentors were students who were adopted when they were “fish.”
- An extended day, after-school class is offered to students every 6 weeks who need to regain credit in English, Algebra, or World History. This class is also used for study skills, homework help, and support for those who need extra assistance. The PLATO lab offers science assistance.

- Caprock offers a two-week extended year program at the end of the school year for students who are ½ to 1½ credits short of becoming a sophomore. Students attend class Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and all four core academic subjects are offered. Appropriate school and parent pressure is exerted upon students to make sure that nearly every qualifying student attends. In addition, there is a regular summer school opportunity.
- Third period is extended for announcements and Channel 1 while the 9th grade initiative features “go fish time.” This is used by the counselor (the Dolphin) and the assistant principal (the Shark) to visit 9th grade classes to celebrate achievements, check student planners, make special announcements, and do everything possible to make 9th grade teachers and students feel special.
- As the freshman year progresses into the second semester, the 9th grade initiative shifts focus to the at-risk student. Teachers choose a “starfish,” who is a student in danger of not gaining enough credits to be a sophomore and of being retained. The teacher uses any means necessary to keep the student on task and on track to become a sophomore. This may mean pulling them out of class to complete assignments they are missing. It also might mean studying with them for a test or reminding them of a current assignment due on Friday. The intent is that the adult makes a difference to the “starfish” and helps them organize, study, and succeed. Any adult on campus can choose a “starfish.” The adult also constantly teaches and models good habits so that the student will see what it takes to achieve success in school.
- At the end of the first semester, there are formal credit recovery “trailer classes” that are for any student who has failed a core class. The student will be taken out of an elective class and placed in a repeat semester class. Caprock has found that students are more successful if they take the class they failed the very next semester. Most important is that teachers use different teaching strategies and techniques to address the needs of these students.

At Caprock, 9th grade failure is simply not tolerated. Administrators and faculty do everything possible to devote resources to motivate all freshmen towards academic success and promotion to the sophomore year. This is a model initiative.

Caprock is also committed to a rigorous and relevant 12th grade year for its students. The school has a dual-credit program and partnership with Amarillo College that is growing in student enrollment. Students are awarded both college and high school credit in courses that meet the requirements of both institutions. During 2005-06, 336 dual credits were earned, all funded by ACE. To qualify, students must achieve an appropriate score on the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA), a college entrance test mandated by the state. Students may be exempted from the THEA if they have appropriate scores on the SAT, ACT, or achieve at an identified level on the state tests required of all students. Dual credit is available in Chemistry, Economics, Government, U.S. History, Pre-calculus, Calculus, English IV, Spanish V, and Business Computer Information Systems. The school also has a growing AP program with enrollment increasing by 48% in the last 3 years. However, the demographics of the student body make the dual-credit program with Amarillo College more practical and affordable.

The 12th grade year features a University Interscholastic League (UIL) academic competition team that has grown as a result of the 9th grade initiative from only five to seven students several years ago to 38 during 2005-06. Six students advanced to regional competition in 2004-05, a first for Caprock, and 17 advanced in 2005-06. Mostly for seniors, there is a Caprock Technical Assistance Program that is a paid work program where students are trained by the school district to be troubleshooters for student and adult computers at Caprock.

The career and technical education programs are impressive. Course offerings for seniors that provide potential after-high-school job opportunities include building trades, a strong agriculture program, a criminal justice dual-credit program with Amarillo College, a renowned drafting program, a new machinist program in partnership with several area businesses, numerous technology courses including a “Bill Gates Certification,” and a cooperative work program serving 120 students. For the past 22 years, Caprock has also had a Marine JROTC program, which has a highly acclaimed Capstone course

for seniors. Also, the ACE program is contributing extensively to the rigor of the 12th grade year. In order to graduate ACE-certified for a fully-paid college education, students must maintain high grade point averages, attendance rates, and positive behavioral records through the senior year. Currently, nearly 75% of juniors will enter their senior year ACE-qualified.

A recent impressive initiative is “12-13” articulation with Amarillo College in English, science and career and technical education. College instructors regularly attend high school department meetings and high school department chairs attend college meetings. The result is that Amarillo College instructors easily recognize the Caprock graduates because of their preparation for college level work.

9. Leadership/ Systems Approach

The principal, Mrs. Rebecca “Becky” Harrison, was recognized in 2002 as the Texas High School Principal of the Year and as a national finalist. In many ways, her unique influence makes Caprock the special place it is. Yet, faculty members readily say that this is a “principal led, not a principal dominated, high school.” Principal Harrison’s vision for student achievement has empowered other administrators, counselors, and teachers to embrace the school’s mission. What she expects from teachers can be demonstrated with the question that she asks while interviewing new teacher candidates: “Tell me how Macbeth relates to a Hispanic girl, age 16 and pregnant, who is getting beat up frequently at night?” She looks for teachers who can make learning relevant to the real life of the students.

The principal’s style is to distribute leadership by collaboratively identifying needs, appointing small faculty study committees, and then supporting initiatives that help students. As a result, leadership has been effectively delegated, distributed, and shared with scores of teachers and administrators. An administrative intern program has identified a number of teachers who voluntarily give up one of their planning periods to pursue administrative tasks.

Each assistant principal is assigned to various academic departments and meets with members of the departments at least twice each 6 weeks. Department chairpersons meet with the principal weekly. The total focus of these meetings is core and stretch learning.

The principal’s mission statement makes it very clear what she expects: “My mission for Caprock is to continue to create a positive support environment for all students and staff — an environment which allows the student to reach his/her potential but also awakens potential they didn’t know they had. I want to foster an environment where the expectations are high and the support is sufficient to achieve those expectations.” In stating her goals, Principal Harrison makes it clear that Caprock is the center for learning for adults and students, and she desires to be a support person for whatever is needed to enhance the delivery of instruction to students. She seeks to foster an environment “where every adult, student, and parent is as passionate about this school and these students as I am.”

The leadership style of the principal has resulted in four empowered and passionate assistant administrators, numerous administrative interns, a quality group of dedicated guidance counselors, and a teaching and support staff committed to each and every student. Every educator understands that he or she is a leader and extended leadership opportunities are available every time a new challenge is presented.

10. Professional Learning Community

The Caprock Teacher Academy is a focused professional development activity for all staff. Meetings are held once or twice a month during the teachers’ planning/preparation periods. Teachers with common planning time form a group working together for the entire year on identified issues. Team leaders are responsible for insuring that meetings are conducted in a manner that is both positive and productive, and each group publishes a final document of successful strategies at the end of the year.

The Academy’s mission changes each year based on an assessment of staff development needs. In 2002-03, the mission was to assist teachers in their classrooms with the implementation of Bloom’s taxonomy and other similar theories to help students produce work that requires higher-level thinking skills and more rigorous learning. For 2003-04, the mission was to provide teachers with strategies to

challenge all students to succeed in rigorous classes. Following a survey of staff, the objective in 2004-05 was to adopt the Rigor and Relevance Framework and teach to higher levels of rigor and application, with a focus on creating lessons that teach to Quadrant D of the framework.

The emphasis on the Rigor and Relevance Framework has continued during 2005-06. Already, an impressive booklet has been developed whereby every teacher has improved one of his or her lessons for increasing the level of rigor and relevance. Each teacher received a copy of this book entitled *Active Learning Lesson Plans — Taking Our Lessons to Quadrant D, Part I*. This has been a valiant start, and Part II with another lesson plan book will be produced. The constant leadership for this activity is the instructional technology support leader who provides focus for the teacher groups during each of the seven sections of the Teacher Academy. In 2005-06 the SIOP initiative, as noted earlier, was implemented to assist teachers with achievement for second language learners.

A teacher support program is in place to ensure that first year teachers at Caprock have a support system to help them achieve success. Each new teacher is assigned a mentor teacher who works with the new teacher on a one-to-one basis. The principal also meets with new teachers once every six weeks — the First Time Club — to assist those new to the campus in understanding the culture and expectations.

Professional development also includes ongoing staff training for integration of technology, yearly workshops on gangs and violence, and workshops on wellness and stress management. The shared decision making committee is empowered with many responsibilities related to professional development and also has a role in developing the extensive campus improvement plan, a yearly comprehensive document required by the school district.

Because of a significant increase of disabled students, professional development is ongoing for a co-teaching and inclusion model for special education students.

Finally, the faculty has recognized a need to design and implement a comprehensive literacy program during 2006-07. In preparation, the administration and department chairs are engaged in a book study using resources such as the NASSP publication, *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals*.

11. Other

The school has an inviting environment for community and parent involvement, made possible by the attitude of all staff members. There are numerous parent involvement activities, advisory groups, a Rotary club mentorship program for students, and two students serve on the United Way Youth Cabinet. A parent involvement coordinator conducts a yearly survey to determine interest of parents in being involved at the school. Approximately two hundred surveys printed in English and Spanish were completed, and survey results were disseminated through a parent newsletter. The main topics of parent interest are identified and programs are structured.

A recent parent emphasis is P.O.S.S.E. — Parents of Successful Student Education. The administration reached out to parents with a new approach. Parents were asked to sign an agreement stating simple standards that all could support and abide by for supporting the education of their children. An outgrowth of the 9th grade initiative, over two hundred parents now attend P.O.S.S.E. meetings each month. Caprock has discovered that a key to involving parents, including disadvantaged ones, is to ask them for help on projects such as decorating the cafeteria at Christmas, chaperoning various student events, and providing food. The belief is that when parents are involved in areas in which they feel competent, academic achievement increases and trust for administrators becomes greater.

The ACE scholarship program is an impressive community initiative. Intended to support low-income families and students, a community foundation has provided a \$6.7 million endowment to support scholarships. For every dollar contributed by a community member, the foundation provides two dollars. Nearly all of the students who will benefit are first time potential college attendees in their families.

Lessons Learned

Numerous initiatives at Caprock are worthy of consideration for replication by other schools.

- *Culture of High Expectations.* Most staff members feel personally responsible if a student fails or drops out of school. Many students report that the vision for their future comes from their teachers who they regard as the “possibility preachers.” Student self-esteem is based on academic success. Adults recognize their responsibility to be role models and know that high expectations for students must come from support, academic interventions, and in a personalized environment with adults giving their most precious resource, their time.
- *Focused Professional Development.* The Caprock Teacher Academy supports the mission of continuous improvement through professional development. This unique way of finding time in a busy schedule results in many literacy initiatives with an interdisciplinary emphasis.
- *Use of Data.* Staff understands that the state testing program is not negotiable. As a result, there is a faculty culture of using test data to improve curriculum and instruction. The six-week formative assessments are especially commendable in an environment where teachers believe that the assessments can be used to help students succeed.
- *Academic Interventions.* Faculty is committed to No Child Left Behind. Numerous academic intervention and credit-recovery options and opportunities are available for students.
- *Ninth Grade Initiative.* Along with the ACE Scholarship Program, the commitment to academic success for every 9th grade student is a cornerstone of this school. From the principal’s level on to every teacher, there is a belief by every staff member that they simply cannot allow any freshman to fail. Juniors and seniors, who were part of the freshman initiative during the 9th grade are committed to “saving the fish.”
- *Culture of Celebration.* Caprock has many ways to celebrate academic and extracurricular success of students. Unique are the programs celebrating faculty members. The methods to celebrate adult and student success are a vital part of the school’s culture.
- *Inviting Environment.* There is a very special feeling that this is one large family, and everyone cares about students and adults being successful. Students, staff and parents at Caprock feel invited to be successful.
- *Special Education Integration.* Caprock is a model for inclusion of students with disabilities including severe disabilities and for meeting the needs of students who need relatively minor 504 accommodations. This school truly celebrates the success of all students.
- *Commitment to Relationships and Personalization.* Starting with the principal and on through all staff members, there is a strong belief that the school exists for only one reason — to help all students learn and grow. Without this level of support, the rigor of the curriculum for many students would be meaningless.
- *Visionary Principal and Commitment to Shared Leadership.* The principal is committed to empowering and developing others as leaders. She seeks to avoid micromanagement, but requires accountability. Programs and policies are institutionalized and made part of how Caprock does business. Leadership capacity has been developed among many teachers, counselors, and administrators. The principal accepts her role as resource provider and barrier remover and is firm, calm, fair, and honest with faculty.

Principal’s List of Three Greatest Strengths

Principal Becky Harrison designated a 21-person committee, including four students, to identify the three greatest strengths of this high school.

1. In the last 7 years, Caprock has experienced an 8% increase in the graduation rate because campus-wide it is committed to its vision: all students can graduate and succeed, and there is a refusal to allow them to slip away without a fight. The school environment promotes the development of a positive rapport between faculty and student body.
2. The leadership of this school is highly focused. Decisions are made based on what is best for learning and best for the school. Committees consisting of staff, teachers, students, and parents address concerns or needs and develop action plans.
3. Caprock assesses and uses ongoing data to upgrade rigor and relevance of teaching and learning to provide students with what is necessary for success on an individual level. Teachers must focus on strengths and weaknesses of every individual in order to “leave no child behind.”

In addition, Principal Harrison emphasizes that Caprock students and staff embrace change and pursue learning. The Teacher Academy, innovative courses, and seamless integration of technology ensure that Caprock continues to provide cutting-edge education. The campus learns and grows together. Development of necessary support systems is the glue that guarantees success. Among these support systems are monthly parent meetings to provide support for parents, a 9th grade program to provide transition support into high school, and a variety of elective programs that support post high school careers.