

Truman High School

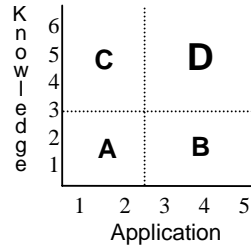
Independence, Missouri

Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- Data-driven decisions
- Shared leadership
- Smaller learning communities
- Professional development
- Supportive relationships
- Literacy integration
- Personalization
- Collaboration

Rigor/Relevance Framework



By the Numbers

- 1,600 students
- 17% minority
- 4% dropout rate
- 92% attendance rate
- 89% four-year graduation rate
- 89% attend postsecondary
- 7% students with disabilities
- 24% economically disadvantaged
- AYP met

Executive Summary

Truman High School (Truman) is a comprehensive grade 9-12 high school serving the suburban, primarily blue-collar community of Independence, Missouri. Truman is named after hometown resident President Harry S. Truman and his wife, Bess Truman. The mascot of Truman High is a patriot, and the school colors are red, white, and blue. Truman is one of three high schools in the Independence School District.

Data-driven decisions, purposeful and thoughtful school redesign, collaboration, supportive staff and student relationships, rigorous and relevant instruction, parent and community involvement, shared leadership, and effective professional development are key ingredients in making Truman an exemplary model. The Building Improvement Plan has three goals – rigor, relevance, and relationships – and all measurable objectives, targeted results, and action steps relate to one of these three goals. The Truman philosophy underscores the belief that all students must have effective skills to permit them to enter the world of work or to pursue additional academic studies. Students must also have the skills to become life-long learners and to grow as self-disciplined, well-rounded individuals.

Truman serves approximately 1,600 students; 17% are minorities, 24% are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and 7% are students with disabilities. The four-year graduation rate has steadily risen over the past few years and now stands at 89%. The school is in the third year of reorganization into five smaller learning communities, or houses, each containing approximately 350 students in grades 9-12, 20 interdisciplinary teachers, a lead teacher, an assistant principal, and one counselor. The houses are balanced with respect to gender, academic ability, and other relevant factors, and generally are situated in a specific wing or section of the school, although the assistant principal's office is in the main office complex. The house provides a unique identity and autonomy for staff and students alike.

A commitment to provide the best possible education for all students resulted in the formation of a High School Task Force to examine the state of the Independence School District's two high schools at the time as well as investigate successful programs across the nation. The result of this work, started in 2004, was 24 recommendations which laid the groundwork for the redesign of the high schools into five smaller, heterogeneous, interdisciplinary houses to better meet the needs of the students.

The seven-period schedule is a unique blend of traditional and block classes. Three days a week the seven periods meet for 52 minutes each. On one day, four of the classes meet in a block format of 90 minutes, and on one day the remaining three classes meet for 90 minutes and there is a half-hour Focus (advisory) period. On this day students are dismissed early, and staff have 90 minutes to engage in department or house activities and professional development. For the most part students must take seven classes each year; staff teach six of seven periods.

1. School Culture

The Vision Statement, “Truman High School equips all students to achieve their dreams,” and the Mission Statement, “The Truman High School community will embrace the practice of rigor, relevance, and relationships in everything we do,” are predominant in the hallways, classrooms, and publications of the school. Truman strives to develop an educational community that provides support for all students. The school promotes meaningful, student-centered, multicultural activities, and teaches critical thinking skills through a varied curriculum and co-curricular activities. Truman believes that education is more than just acquired knowledge and places an emphasis on rigorous, performance-based standards. The school encourages academic exploration and fosters an environment where there is freedom to examine different points of view. The school and district are committed to creating learning programs in which the school, parents, and community work together to develop effective growth opportunities for students.

The environment at Truman is safe, orderly, and respectful. The faculty and staff create a culture of high expectations and responsibility, and provide appropriate support both in and outside the classroom. While parts of the building are over forty years old, the facility is bright, well maintained, and inviting. Personalization has been a goal of the school in recent years and there is an abundance of student work and relevant staff or class information displayed in classrooms, hallways, and at all entrances and intersections. Until this year there has not been a formal character education program at the high school; however, the staff teaches, models, and expects responsible behavior. The school is proactive in promoting positive staff and student interactions, and Focus has only helped to enhance the overall positive environment that exists.

While there was nothing “broken” in the Independence School District, a commitment to insure that each learner will achieve the skills and self-confidence to be successful in an ever-changing world was the rationale and impetus for a task force to study the state of high school education in the district. The High School Task Force was formed in the fall of 2004, and was made up of parents, community leaders, teachers, and administrators. Three subcommittees studied specific areas: collaboration and professional learning communities; personalization of the school environment for students; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This group of 50 met 18 times over six months to identify the current level of services and supports for students, the desired level of services, and a plan for improvement. Suggestions came in the form of 24 Recommendations for High School Redesign and were approved by the School Board in June, 2005. Since then, Truman has worked to address the 24 recommendations through the careful and purposeful implementation of programs, initiatives, and supporting professional development. A high school redesign coordinator works closely with the administration in overseeing and implementing the redesign efforts. Never prone to jump on bandwagons or packaged programs, “Trumanizing” is a way of life as the school researches, reflects, adapts, and implements best programs and practices that are of benefit to students. Supporting the efforts are the federal Smaller Learning Communities grant and state High Schools That Work (HSTW) grant.

The school has been diligent in providing and promoting a rigorous and relevant education for all students. The principal meets with small groups of sophomore students prior to enrollment and shows the Shift Happens video to them and their parents to underscore the importance of taking courses that push or stretch them academically and personally. Barriers to taking pre-AP, AP, and dual enrollment courses are generally absent. It is not unusual to find advanced placement students talking to underclassmen about the importance and benefits of participation. Truman also hosts an AP night in April for students enrolled in AP classes for the upcoming year and their parents. For several years Truman has held an academic letter assembly during the school day. During this assembly students who qualify for an academic letter or who achieved proficient/advanced scores on state assessments are honored. Truman also hosts a senior awards night for students who have earned scholarships, and at graduation the school honors a Patriot Scholar in each department for exemplary performance.

2. Foundation Learning

The core academic program at Truman is built on the belief that all students should be provided a rigorous and relevant education. Truman offers a comprehensive program of studies at the school, college preparation, pre-AP (English and science only), and AP level, and has removed most prerequisites for honors courses. Twenty-five credits are required for graduation for the class of 2010 and beyond, with four units required in communication arts, three units each in social studies, mathematics, and science; one unit each in fine arts, practical arts, and physical education; ½ unit in career connections, health, and personal finance; 4 units in specified core electives or career plan; and 3½ units of electives.

On the spring, 2008, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), 58.6% of 10th grade students scored at the proficient or advanced level in mathematics, while 37.4% of 11th grade students scored proficient or advanced in ELA. The latter was an unusual drop, as the school has focused on literacy in the past few years and typically students score much higher. ACT scores have steadily risen in English to 22.5, in reading to 23.3, in mathematics to 21.4, and in science to 22.3. Composite ACT scores are 22, with a 62% participation level. Truman uses the Accelerated Reader program to support the reading initiative. Each year only about 50% of incoming freshmen test on grade level; over 70% of seniors test on grade level by the time they graduate. The number of students taking Advanced Placement tests has increased to 187 students writing 280 tests, with approximately 60% scoring 3 or above.

A four-year Plan of Study worksheet for each student is maintained by the Focus advisory teacher and is reviewed annually, and updated if necessary, by both students and parents. Beginning in the freshman year, in Focus and in the required freshman Career Connections class, students are provided self inventories, surveys, and information regarding the six career pathways and the 16 career clusters available to them.

“It takes a village – and time” might be the rally words for the five-year literacy initiative at Truman. The initiative has four goals to be completed by 2010. Students will:

- read the equivalent of 25 books a year, including books read in the Accelerated Reader program and in English class, and pages of text in other classes
- write weekly in all classes
- use reading and writing strategies to enhance learning in all classes
- write a research piece in all classes.

In order to meet these goals, the school provides guidance for the staff via a literacy coordinator, uses the Accelerated Reader program to manage student reading, and tests students three times a year to determine reading levels using STAR Reader. Twenty minutes of silent sustained reading is provided three times a week. A Research and Writing Handbook serves as a resource for teachers and students for the implementation of the literacy plan. Literacy across the curriculum is practiced and professional development is continuously offered so that teachers in all areas feel comfortable and competent in implementing literacy in their content areas.

Inclusion of the majority of special education students in mainstream classes with appropriate accommodations has proven to be effective in meeting their needs and raising the level of rigor and relevance of instruction. Co-teaching takes place in the four core areas, with a subject specialist and special education teacher providing instruction. Teachers who co-teach participate in several activities, including personality assessments and speed dating, as a way to create the best match for teams. All of the co-teachers meet on a monthly basis for additional professional development and to check on progress made in the class and as a team. There is differentiation of instruction, with the subject specialist providing the “what” and the special education teacher providing the “how” for students. However, the teachers work as a team and visitors to a classroom will have a hard time distinguishing one from another.

The school and district have earned the Distinction in Performance accreditation from the Missouri Department of Education. Awards and recognition in the areas of speech and debate, band and

choir, color guard, student government, student athlete scholar honors, industrial tech competitions, FBLA and DECA, and athletics add to the tradition of excellence. The Student Council Relay for Life raised over \$46,000 for the American Cancer Society in the event's second year. Teachers have received the Daughters of the American Revolution teacher of the year award, and the National Forensic League awarded the Truman coach its four diamond rating.

3. Stretch Learning

There are many opportunities for students at Truman to engage in rigorous and relevant academic activities and classes. Although the district does not presently require a fourth year of English (required for Class of 2010) or mathematics, over 90% and 83% of seniors were enrolled in these classes respectively, in addition to 50% enrolled in a fourth year of science. Data for the past few years indicates that over 90% of graduates complete their program with more than the minimum 25 units.

There has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in Advanced Placement and dual credit offerings. At Truman there are 14 Advanced Placement offerings and over two dozen dual credit courses at Metropolitan Community College and the University of Missouri-Kansas City. There is a consistent effort to encourage students to enroll in such classes. The school realizes that as students pursue courses with increased rigor supports and extra help must also increase.

There is a wide variety of electives available for students in the fine and visual arts, from courses in two-and three-dimensional art to numerous bands, choirs, and orchestras. Over a dozen courses in speech, debate, legal communications, and broadcast communications offer students the opportunity to engage in rigorous and relevant real-world activities. Each day a television broadcast is made in first block, with an extended broadcast once a week during lunch. In the practical arts, students may choose from journalism, photojournalism, yearbook, publications, and media relations. A wide complement of courses in business, career, and technical education provides multiple avenues for students to pursue these areas of interest. In business there is everything from graphic design to computer maintenance, accounting to marketing internships. Family and consumer science choices range from life skills to culinary arts to child development, including several options for dual enrollment credit. Physical education encompasses strength training and conditioning, team and lifetime activities, and fundamentals of coaching. The two dozen electives in industrial technology include digital electronics, drafting, metal and wood processes and manufacturing, and photography. Truman has recently become involved with Project Lead the Way and offers two classes – Introduction to Engineering and Principles of Engineering – with the intention of adding Digital Electronics next year. French, German, and Spanish are offered through level IV, with French also at the AP level.

All freshmen are required to take the Career Connections course. There are also courses available to explore health and public safety careers, entrepreneurial studies, and teaching, including a cadet experience.

Junior and senior students who wish to pursue an even more hands-on and concentrated program of vocational studies can spend a half day at Truman in required courses and a half day at the Herndon Center. Approximately 45 students presently take diverse courses such as Auto Collision, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, and Entrepreneurship.

Teachers in the elective areas are presently studying the career-tech keys from HSTW to determine areas of need and how to further implement these keys. Relevance has always been central to these courses; there have been discussions in each house and department on how relevance can be the springboard to increasing the rigor in each class. The literacy initiative has also been critical in this objective of increasing rigor.

In the fall of 2007 a group of special education students in the functional life skills classes created a proposal and made a business presentation to start a coffee shop. The students were awarded start-up money and set up the Patriot Cup during the first two blocks of the day. With their teacher's assistance students are responsible for ordering supplies; preparing coffee and other drinks, as well as food; serving at the counter; and delivering to faculty. Students rotate additional assignments such as keeping the

books, conducting inventory, creating grocery lists, and shopping for supplies. The Patriot Cup is a successful money-maker which not only provides students with real-life knowledge and skills but also funds school and outside activities.

4. Learner Engagement

Small learning communities provide the structure for students, parents, and teachers to get to know each other well. Closer relationships allow everyone to work together to create benefits for students. Connections to specific caring adults are made during the first two years of high school when the majority of classes are taken within one of the five houses. Teachers are able to work with a smaller number of students over a longer period of time, providing a level of personalization and support that may not be possible in a larger school. For instance, each house has been charged with the responsibility of planning and scheduling extra help for students. Progress reports are created up to seven times a year, informing students and parents about academic status and extra help times from their teachers. This year these reports are also being emailed to parents. These reports are in addition to the online grade book parents can access and the grade cards that are sent home. One positive improvement has been the tripling of extra-help hours logged by students.

Every student at Truman is assigned an adult advocate who remains with that student for four years in the Focus program. Almost all full-time teachers are Focus advisors who meet weekly with students to deliver a well-articulated curriculum based on academic development (rigor), career development (relevance), and personal/social skills (relationships). Advisors are intended to be a primary support for students and their parents while at Truman. They are the first to see the progress reports and work with their students on academic issues. Counselors serve as advisors to students and as support personnel to the Focus teachers. Students are very comfortable with either of these adults; counselors report that they can participate in more meaningful dialogue with students regarding issues of concern. Senior mentors are assigned to each Focus group to work individually and collectively with students and the faculty advisor on social and academic concerns. One goal was for 90% of seniors to report in surveys that they had at least one caring adult at the school that they could go to for assistance or advice. In a recent survey of students, 88% agreed that there was an adult at Truman to whom they could go with a problem. When asked if teachers seemed to value relationships with students, 85% of students said yes.

In addition, students and parents meet the Focus advisors at enrollment night conferences early in the second semester to discuss, plan, and enroll in courses for the subsequent year. This year over 85% of parents participated in the enrollment conferences.

Truman has a program called Learning First for students involved in activities governed by state competitions, such as athletics, band, speech and debate, and Scholars' Bowl, who may be experiencing academic difficulties. While the state has a "no pass, no play" policy that mandates students be passing six of seven classes, Truman requires students to be passing all classes. However, the school provides proactive support so that sanctions do not have to be enforced. Grade checks are done by the activities director and coaches on a regular basis to keep track of the students. All sports offer study halls beginning in week three for any athletes with grades of D or F. Many teams are using upperclassmen to tutor underclassmen. The failure rate of athletes has steadily decreased and Truman has received several academic honors from the state for high athletic grade point averages.

The Power of Incomplete (POI) program at Truman was established to help hold students accountable for completing coursework, thereby increasing their chances of reaching higher academic achievement. It is centered on three questions for teachers.

- What are the essential pieces of your curriculum?
- What happens if a student does not do an essential piece of your curriculum?
- What happens if the student does the essential piece but it is not "up-to-snuff?"

Teachers are asked to have a minimum of one significant assignment every six weeks that falls under POI guides. Incomplete work can be notes, projects, or papers, depending on the nature of the course. Students are given increasing consequences for incomplete work, from teacher-assigned detention; Wednesday school, issued by administrators; and academic contracts issued by administrators for repeat offenders. It is recommended that a teacher not allow students to take tests unless all incomplete work has been satisfactorily completed.

An eight-member attendance committee of teachers, counselors, and administrators meets to discuss students who have missed more than 10 days a semester. Sanctions such as requiring students to make up missed time and work, probation, or denial of credit are possible.

5. Personal Skill Development

Truman is committed to assisting students to develop the personal management and team-building skills needed to become successful learners and responsible citizens in the 21st century. The school believes that when efforts are focused on relevance and relationships, rigor follows naturally. Relationships are an integral part of the school redesign and a key reason for the Focus advisory program. The program aims to have students understand the correlation between time management, study skills, grades, and school; utilize personal learning styles and academic strengths and weaknesses in order to maximize learning and consistently produce high-quality work; understand that a changing world demands lifelong learning; utilize career assessment results to plan for potential careers; use effective communication and social skills in relationships with others; and apply methods of successful problem solving, including accepting consequences of decisions.

Patriots Assisting Truman Students (PATS) is a senior mentoring program that supports incoming freshmen. PATS summer training for selected juniors focuses on how to support freshmen, how to aid Focus advisor teachers in curriculum delivery, and how to be a role model to others. Following the training, PATS assist with Freshman Orientation and Freshman First Day activities. They meet with their freshmen Focus students during the weekly Focus period. On curriculum days they help Focus teachers deliver curriculum. During non-curriculum days they work with their freshmen on goal setting, study skills, and homework. PATS also provide assistance during open houses, parent conferences, enrollment conferences, and career day. While mentoring is their primary responsibility, they serve as terrific ambassadors for the school. PATS get as much out of the program in terms of personal growth and development as the freshmen they mentor. When asked on end-of-the-year surveys for the name of their Focus advisor, many freshmen initially named their PATS senior mentor!

The state of Missouri has a program entitled A+ where students can earn credit for scholarships at participating community colleges and four-year institutions. Students must meet eligibility requirements that include a minimal G.P.A. of 2.5, as well as attendance, citizenship, and community service components.

This year was the first for a school-wide Career Fair at Truman. Speakers were invited in each of the six career pathways and students were able to attend various workshops throughout the day. In addition, a college fair was set up in the gym with representatives from community, private and public colleges, and the armed forces.

The Character Council is a new venture that ties directly into the district's new Character Plus program. Approximately 70 students from all walks of Truman life were selected to serve as a resource to promote character values to students throughout the year.

6. High-quality Curriculum and Instruction

One of the more significant changes taking place at Truman is the shift from teacher- and subject-oriented instruction to student-oriented instruction. All house leaders and teaching and learning coaches were trained in the Rigor/Relevance Framework and have worked with members of their house or department defining exactly what they mean by rigor and relevance and what it looks like from a

student's perspective. An increasing majority of staff feel comfortable utilizing the Framework as a tool to examine and improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and now are turning their attention to the identification and inclusion of instructional strategies that are most effective. While walkthroughs by administrators are done once a week, teachers also can visit model classrooms of their colleagues.

During the transition to houses, building trusting relationships among members of the house was paramount. House leaders had been trained to facilitate this process and after more than two years each house has become more confident and comfortable in sharing lessons and student work. During the pre-lesson protocol members of a house provide each other with ideas for improving a particular lesson. The post-lesson protocol is used to give feedback. Issues included in the discussion are application of the Rigor/Relevance Framework, literacy and numeracy, use of the Power of Incomplete, and instructional strategies. Examination of student work is critical to these discussions.

The literacy plan has had an important effect on the school's program. Teachers have been trained in effective reading and writing strategies and are able to incorporate these strategies as part of their daily instruction in each content area. The school utilizes the 6+1 Trait Writing Checklist as well as a scoring rubric to provide consistency across disciplines. Rubrics in all content areas are continually being developed to provide teachers, and especially students, with clear indicators of high-quality work. Reading levels and writing proficiencies of students have steadily increased and the effect has been felt in the classroom and on standardized tests.

It is evident that Truman teachers have progressed beyond "what" should be taught in class to the "how." Teachers know what high rigor and high relevance work looks like. Some examples illustrate this.

- Students in Legal Communications prepare prosecution and defense material; examine witness statements, exhibits, and the Federal Rules of Evidence; and conduct a trial as the culminating activity.
- Each year American History students visit the Truman Library, take on the part of President Truman and his advisors, and participate in a full-day simulation to solve a crisis during Truman's presidency.
- In Special Education students are exposed to familiar situations to teach them how to make appropriate choices when faced with similar circumstances.
- In Statistics class there is a survey of the day posted. Students write their response on the board as they walk in the door and the results are then analyzed and used to demonstrate the concept in the day's lesson.
- Over 100 Culinary Arts students job shadow for a day in restaurants and complete and share a report on the experience with classmates.
- Business students complete resumes, research and apply for jobs, and participate in mock interviews.

Silent sustained reading (SSR) began six years ago at Truman High School. Three times a week, during the 5th hour lunch block, each classroom spends 20 minutes engaging in SSR, with both students and teachers reading for pleasure. The school literacy coach uses this time to conduct book talks. Fifth-hour teachers do periodic checks on student reading logs to insure students are progressing in their reading. SSR, combined with the Accelerated Reader program, has created a true culture of readers at Truman. Data indicates that student reading levels have steadily increased over time, and that the number of books checked out of the library has risen over 700% since the initiative began.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

The Independence School District is a results-oriented organization that is constantly tracking student progress while listening to and valuing the voices of all constituents – students, parents, community members, teachers, and support staff. A commitment to examining local and national data,

surveys, and questionnaires provides an accurate picture of their successes and challenges as a school community.

The school, houses, departments, and individual teachers routinely analyze information from the Missouri Assessment Program, ACT, PSAT, and AP examinations. Student reading levels are measured via STAR Reader and disseminated to students, parents, and staff three times a year. The school keeps statistics on attendance, dropout, and graduation rates, in addition to success rates in support classes and hours of extra help provided. To provide the school with information on student preparation, surveys are conducted of graduates enrolled in remedial courses at the local community colleges. Students in 9th and 12th grades are surveyed as part of the one-day technical review. Once a week the principal and five assistant principals conduct a minimum of five walkthroughs of classrooms to provide feedback on rigor, relevance, and relationship objectives.

The Building Improvement Plan (BIP) is the roadmap as well as the gauge for school improvement. Rigor, relevance, and relationships serve as the three overarching goals for the school with very specific, measurable objectives and targeted results. Action steps, indicators of success/outcomes, the method of evaluation, and requisite improvement statistics regarding testing are contained in the document. It specifies the improvement of staff knowledge via professional development on issues such as numeracy, literacy, instructional strategies, integrating technology, HSTW career tech keys, and the advisory program.

Several years ago the High Schools That Work Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) provided the school with a clear, comprehensive picture and a roadmap for improvement. Since then the school has completed its own internal Technical Review Visit (TRV). The purpose of the TRV is to follow up on the recommendations in the TAV report. The TRV helps district and school leaders and teachers:

- assess progress in implementing actions recommended in previous TAV reports and appraise improvements in student achievement
- use data to determine needs and actions; and assess the alignment of school improvement, teaching reforms, and student work with standards
- accelerate improvement by promoting the school's self-reflection and evaluation.

For this internal technical review a team, including Truman teachers and house leaders (but not high school administrators), teachers from the other high schools and middle schools, and an assistant superintendent from the middle school, is assembled. Armed with specific criteria based on the challenges from the previous TAV, the team conducts 15-20 minute observations in most classrooms at the high school. A classroom observation form identifying student and teacher actions as well as lesson placement in the Rigor/Relevance Framework is employed. Interviews with grade 9 and 12 students round out the day. At the conclusion of the day the team meets to discuss findings and prepare a report, which is shared with the entire faculty on the next day.

Each year Truman conducts Extreme Test Day. On this day each grade takes an assessment. Freshmen take an off-grade assessment that is used as a predictor of how they will perform on the state test. Sophomores take the PSAT and the results are used for AP potential and for enrollment conferences. Juniors take the PSAT or ASVAB – also for enrollment purposes. Seniors can take a placement test for the local community colleges or go through a speaker circuit regarding colleges and careers.

To provide a guide, as well as insure equity, the four core areas have common benchmark tests staggered throughout the year. A midyear and final assessment of some kind, including possibly a performance-based measure, is required in all subjects.

8. Transitions

Transition to Truman High school begins in the 8th grade. A Transition Committee, comprised of high school and middle school administrators and counselors, assigns students to the five houses, balancing the houses with respect to student characteristics such as gender, academic ability, race, special

education needs, and English proficiency. Two nights in February are set aside for freshman enrollment, when parents and 8th grade students meet with staff at the high school to choose classes based on recommendations provided by the middle school. Prior to school in August, the school sponsors a Freshman Orientation Night when staff, the Truman Student Council, and PATS program members welcome and provide incoming freshmen and their parents with tours of the school and conduct other housekeeping chores. A few days later, freshmen return one afternoon for Freshman First Day when they receive their schedules and meet their classroom and Focus teachers.

Freshmen are not only assigned to a weekly Focus group with a faculty advisor who remains with them for four years, but they also have several senior PATS mentors to help them through the myriad of social and academic issues that may arise. Also in Focus, members of the business community spend time with freshmen discussing careers, providing real-world relevance to their studies as well as valuable community involvement in their school.

Career Connections is a required semester class for all freshmen designed to assist students in their successful transition into high school. The course helps students connect their high school classes to their career goals. Students learn about themselves through interest and aptitude assessments, and conduct career investigations about job trends and workplace opportunities. Students explore the six career pathways and 16 career clusters and research specific career interests in order to create career portfolios. Students also strengthen their study skills and learn how to become effective citizens in the community.

Students in grades 10-12 continue with their Focus teacher during their time at Truman. Not only do the teachers deliver a well-articulated and planned advisory curriculum, they continue to be the primary link between the home and school. Each year Truman conducts four enrollment conferences at night for students and parents. Two are typically for incoming freshmen; two other nights are set aside for Focus teachers, counselors, and administrators to meet with students in grades 9-11 to review and update the four-year plan, as well as choose courses for the next year.

Each October the school conducts two open houses for parents to meet the teachers at the school in an informal setting. On those nights there are representatives from the military, community colleges in the area and major state colleges in Missouri. All year long the school conducts a college visitor program weekly during Focus; some colleges visit on other days as scheduling permits. A college extravaganza is conducted once a year by the district for the three high schools.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

House leaders are the teacher leaders of the five smaller learning communities. They are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating all professional development activities for their house based on specific yearly goals. These goals come from the High School Task Force's 24 recommendations, the Building Improvement Plan, SLC Grant Goals, and feedback from various systems of accountability. House leaders are trained to dialogue versus discuss; establishing trust with their teams was paramount in the redesign. While there is an assistant principal assigned to each house, they remained in the background for the first six months of the conversion to houses so that the house leaders could establish this new relationship with their teachers. House leaders are supported through extra personal planning time and a common time for discussion, planning, and leadership development. House leaders meet four times a week with the high school redesign coordinator. Spring and fall surveys of houses are conducted to determine progress on goals and future priorities for the house, school, and district.

Assistant principals assigned to each house work as co-leaders within the house determining and providing professional development, forming and evaluating objectives, and examining data and policies. They work with students and parents regarding discipline-related referrals. They perform weekly walkthroughs, formally observe classes, and evaluate teachers, a function not performed by house leaders or teaching and learning coaches. They are part of the administrative team and as such have their offices together in the main office. Each is assigned departments to oversee and is also responsible for an area such as scheduling, special education, textbooks, attendance, vocational programs, 504's, or substitutes.

There is one teaching and learning coach (TLC) in each of the core areas of English, social studies, mathematics, and science. The TLCs' role has been evolving over the years. Originally, they were responsible for guiding curriculum concerns and benchmark assessments. TLCs have been trained in the Rigor/Relevance Framework and are now beginning to work more as an instructional coach for their colleagues.

The school and district are committed to building teacher leadership capacity. The Teacher Leadership Series is a combination of seminars and cadre meetings to support a culture of continuous and sustainable improvement. It is intended for classroom teachers at all schools and levels who are not necessarily aspiring administrators, with the goal of helping them be more productive committee, department, and house members. The Teacher Leadership Seminar is a single, three-hour event every June and includes a leadership survey on strengths, weaknesses, and gap analysis; Unlocking Teacher Leadership protocol; mental models/paradigms; and the 80% comfortable/100% committed concept. Teacher Leadership Cadres are 90-minute topical meetings conducted two or three times a semester. Topics include systems thinking, difficult conversations, and *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni. There are no prerequisites to attend any seminar or cadre.

The Building Leadership Team is comprised of the five house leaders, the four teaching and learning coaches, representatives from all departments, from special education, and the counselors. They meet twice a month with the building principal and the high school redesign coordinator to discuss the formation, implementation, and progress of the Building Improvement Plan.

The Principal's Advisory Committee (PAC) is composed of teachers from all departments and a student from each grade. Once a month the PAC meets with the associate principal to discuss business items such as the final schedule for exams, the parking lot, use of student id's, and air quality reports.

10. Professional Learning Community

In June, 2005, the High School Task Force presented to the district the 24 Recommendations for High School Redesign. Four of the 10 recommendations under Collaboration and Professional Learning Communities are worthy of highlighting.

- The principal will provide leadership with vision, direction, and focus. This will include a strong mission/vision statement; consistent reminders of direction; high expectations of staff, students, and self; and a system of accountability for all.
- Members of the staff will collaborate as a school community to develop and implement the school's learning goals. This will include providing time for discussions and planning, creating sacred time for focusing on curriculum and instruction, and developing common planning times.
- Every school will promote the use of personal learning plans for each educator. Teachers will be given leadership roles in planning and/or developing professional development. Feedback from peers, administrators, and students regarding ways to improve instruction and learning in the classroom will be gathered.
- The school will promote policies and practices that recognize diversity and will offer ongoing professional development to help educators appreciate issues of diversity and expose students to a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences.

One of the significant structural changes resulting from the Task Force recommendations was the redesign of each of the two larger high schools into five small learning communities, called houses. Even more significant was the fact that the houses were given much autonomy in implementing the general goals of rigor, relevance, and relationships for their students. House leaders have provided instruction on the Rigor/Relevance Framework, and much discussion has taken place about how to define, recognize, and measure rigor, relevance, and relationships. The houses have implemented their own plans for providing extra help, the Power of Incomplete policy, pre- and post-lesson protocols, literacy and

numeracy, and student engagement. Every teacher at Truman has a copy of the Instructional Strategies Handbook and is working within the house choosing, researching, sharing, and implementing a particular strategy.

To support the instructional strategy initiative, teachers at Truman can apply to be a demonstration model classroom of one of six focused strategies – cooperative learning, Socratic seminar, problem-based learning, differentiation, questioning, or pre-reading. The focus is on strategy and not just about one magic lesson. Staff who wish to establish a model classroom must provide evidence of understanding and consistent use of one or more of the strategies. If a teacher meets the criteria using rubrics in the Instructional Strategies Handbook from the International Center for Leadership in Education, then the model classroom is established and open to visits from fellow teachers. This year new teachers were required to visit at least one of the model classrooms; visits were optional for all others. Truman plans to expand the concept next year and is adding co-teaching to the list of strategies.

Learning Walks is another relatively new initiative. Twice a year – once within the house and once outside – all teachers will visit other classrooms to observe progress on designated school objectives. For instance, the first walk this year focused on using bell ringers, displaying the objectives of the lesson, and observing two great things. Over two days all these brief visits are completed and data is compiled, shared, and discussed with the staff. The second walk this year concentrated on objectives, student-centered versus teacher-centered instruction, instructional strategies, and two great things to be shared.

11. Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Double-dip English was implemented four years ago with the purpose of assisting deficient freshmen to be successful in regular English classes throughout their high school career. Double-dip students are in English 1 twice as long as regular English 1 students. Part of the time is spent teaching the students reading strategies and study skills; the other part of the time is spent presenting the regular English 1 curriculum so that the students do not fall further behind. Classes are kept small and do not include special needs students. Instead, this class focuses on helping students who are behind in skills but do not qualify for special education services. Data indicates that over the past few years from 62% to 79% of students in double-dip English passed the first semester of their sophomore English class.

Likewise, the Double-dip math program was started in 2005 to address the 9th grade students entering below grade level in mathematics. The course meets for two periods in a row and focuses on essential prerequisite skills and processes while building confidence in mathematics ability. This enables Truman to eliminate lower level catch-up courses such as General Mathematics and Pre-algebra, and to deliver an Algebra 1 curriculum to all students in 9th grade. For each of the double-dip programs, students receive one unit of elective credit for successful completion.

Special education students are aggressively mainstreamed with appropriate support in all classes. Co-teaching exists in all four core disciplines. These classes contain both regular and special education students; the class is considered a general education setting. Co-teaching at Truman takes on many forms: station teaching; parallel teaching; one teach, one assist; alternate teaching; and team teaching. Students and parents surveyed have been very positive regarding the level of support all the students receive while maintaining the level of rigor and relevance expected in the class.

Students with disabilities that may prevent them from being entirely mainstreamed may be found in several different, specialized programs. Students in the Communication Behavior Social Skills group may be in functional skills classes for core subjects and placed in electives with support. Truman houses the district program for autistic high school students, who are mainstreamed where appropriate but receive much support in a specialized setting. Students who are designated as severely handicapped attend a program at a sister high school in the district.

SOAR (Students Optimizing Academic Relationships) is a program that has been developed to help at-risk, non-special education students at Truman who are not eligible or not able to attend the district's alternative high school. Freshmen invited this year were behind in credits and had minor struggles with attendance and/or behavior. Families sign a contract that ensures students will attempt to

succeed in the program and parents will become involved in activities such as parent conferences. A teacher meets with students once a day to triage with them as well as work with them on study skills and behavior management. It is anticipated that the program will be extended through the senior year for eligible students.

The houses are now working on a Student Intervention Protocol which will identify problems a student is experiencing, review what intervention strategies and techniques have been tried or are suggested, and suggest what interventions should be implemented.

Truman uses the Accellus learning program to provide on-line coursework for students who have fallen behind or who transfer from other schools mid-semester and need more courses. Students must take seven classes at Truman; if a student drops a class, the student is placed in a study hall and in an on-line class. A Learning Lab is maintained by a certified teacher for students needing extra help, extended time, or assistance with study skills.

Lessons Learned

- Establishing relationships with students is an important factor in forming and maintaining a positive school culture and learning environment. Rigor and relevance will follow.
- Successful school improvement and redesign require thoughtful, purposeful, and collaborative information gathering, planning, and implementation that involve the entire school community.
- Professional development must be focused and sustained, with sufficient time provided during the year for staff to engage in meaningful dialogue. Teachers should assume considerable ownership and leadership of professional development.
- Data should be utilized as the cornerstone of school improvement efforts.
- A school-wide literacy effort to improve student reading, writing, speaking, and thinking will have a profound effect on student achievement.
- Barriers preventing students from taking advanced courses should be overcome. When students are encouraged and properly supported, they will accept rigorous instruction and meet the demands of advanced work.
- As rigor increases so, too, must the level of support, both within and outside the class.
- Co-teaching provides a win-win for all students involved.

Principal's List of Three Greatest Strengths

Principal Kristel Barr offered the following as strengths of Truman High School.

1. We are a school that is invested in the journey we are making. We know we must continue to grow and change to do what is best for our kids and we are dedicated to doing that. Everything we focus on now – from book studies to collaboration to professional development – is centered around rigor, relevance, and relationships. This is not a passing fad for us; we will stay this course.
2. We have a strong network for extra help and this will continue to grow. This extra help takes place before school, after school, and even during school through our Learning Lab. We know that as we increase rigor, we must increase support.
3. We have a strong focus on literacy. All of our teachers implement silent sustained reading for at least 60 minutes a week. We practice literacy across the curriculum and are implementing the Southern Regional Education Board literacy goals over the course of five years. Even our P.E. teachers have literacy Friday. We continue to offer professional development so that teachers feel competent in implementing literacy in their content areas.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Best Practice

Data-in-a-Day

Each spring, Truman High School trains a team of its own teachers and teachers and administrators from feeder middle schools in the Data-in-a-Day program. Data-in-a-Day is comprised of numerous classroom observations as well as student interviews, all of which take place in a single school day. Classroom observations and interview questions focus on three or four issues which are determined by the Building Leadership Team and are based on analysis of data received throughout the current year from various systems of accountability embedded in existing programs.

The Data-in-a-Day team give the results of the observations and interviews to the faculty the next day. A PowerPoint presentation highlights successes and challenges and offers suggestions for improvement. All of the highlighted areas are backed up with data from observations and interviews. A report is then prepared for the Building Leadership Team, which uses the results to create the Building Improvement Plan for the subsequent school year.

The cost of the Data-in-a-Day program is limited to substitute teachers, basic supplies, and lunch. It also requires a building leader to plan and implement the program. The results have been extremely effective in supporting a culture of continuous improvement at Truman High School. Benefits include, but are not limited to:

- modeling and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement through purposeful assessment of initiatives and programs
- using data to determine needs and actions through assessing the alignment of school improvement initiatives and programs, teacher actions, and student outcomes
- accelerating school improvement by promoting self-reflection and evaluation
- celebrating progress made on initiatives and programs.