



## Letter from the Sponsoring Superintendent – Christopher T. Lester

We welcome you to review our sponsor's report for the 2006-2007 school year. The Hamilton Local Digital Academy (HLDA) officially opened its doors on September 15, 2003. Their primary purpose is to offer the highest quality alternative educational program available. The information that follows provides a statistical and narrative overview of the school during the past school year. We are pleased with the strides they have made and look forward to aggressively continuing to support them as they continue to improve their performance. Based upon the newness of the delivery system and the educational background of many of their students, we are pleased with the results. However, we will never be satisfied until every student shows growth and improvement.

### **NOW AND THE FUTURE**

To address key issues regarding student performance garnered from data collected during the 2006-2007 school year, the academy has implemented a continuous progress model in grades 7 - 12 that allows students to work at their specific instructional levels. This methodology is critical to student academic growth. In the future, the model will also be implemented at the elementary level. For SY 04 - 05 the academy introduced a year round school calendar. This approach has allowed their students the greatest learning flexibility as well as the ability to provide greater ongoing academic support.

During the 2006-2007 school year, the academy also began offering a second tract for High School students through the American School program. This program allowed secondary students who were unable to maintain pace in our digital, computer based program, to work in a more familiar atmosphere.

As sponsors, we believe that parents play a critical role in the education of their children. We appreciate the support they have already given by the decision to enroll their children in HLDA and the follow up educational support they have provided their children and our staff.

Should you have questions regarding this report, please contact me at [clester@hamilton-local.k12.oh.us](mailto:clester@hamilton-local.k12.oh.us) or call (614) 491-8044.

### ***Section One – Academic Program***

The State Model Courses of Study are the basis for HLDA/TDA Curriculum. To develop our curriculum during 03 - 04 SY, we used the following process. Through study and review of the State Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade Level Indicators we looked for content resources from the World Wide Web and subscriptions sites that supported these standards. Once we ascertained that the sites were appropriate, we built them into our program. The rationale for this process was to insure that our students were prepared for the state proficiency tests, which are aligned to the State Model Courses

of Study. We also needed content resources that supported our digital learning environment and that was also deliverable over any connection speed, whether slow or fast. We used a database alignment tool to make sure that the lessons designed by our teachers aligned to the appropriate state standards and that these standards were covered in our content delivery. This alignment process was and is an ongoing task which our teachers complete as they design their lessons.

The Hamilton Local Digital Academy courses were delivered using an Internet-based educational collaboration tool, FirstClass. This year, our digital students have moved up to the Angel environment. The HLDA/TDA learning environment allowed students and teachers to engage in both asynchronous and synchronous interactions. Following instruction and completion of work, the student progressed onto the next unit. One of the goals was to allow students to move forward at their own pace.

The amount of instructional time for our students was 920 hours each year. Due to the fact that many of our students worked online, the fit between the number of standards and the instructional hours was fairly straightforward. The standards were aligned to the students' online lessons. As they progressed through the curriculum, they met both the hourly requirements through regular attendance, participation in chats and discussions, completion of assignments, and ongoing assessment by staff.

With our correspondence program, we require our students to stay in contact with the academy director no less than on a weekly basis. Each student is required to communicate and deliver work weekly. Our alternative academy features a full-time instructor that provides classroom instruction to our alternative students as well as tutoring and assistance for correspondence students.

## **Our Core Principles and Goals for 2006-2007**

### Core Principles

1. No student will be placed in a high stakes state mandated testing situation until the student has the skills and understandings to be successful.
2. In HLDA, time is the variable, and the outcome is constant.
3. Mastery learning is critical to student success and achievement.

### Goals

- ◆ Class level goal setting will be replaced by individual goal setting strategies. What does this statement mean? First, once assessment and placement of the student is complete, students will work with their parents and staff to determine learning goals and mastery standards for the time frame. Secondly, they will determine the Qualification Level they wish to attain in the mastery of these standards.
- ◆ Students will progress only when they have reached at least a Level 1 mastery level. Included in this process will be the opportunity to redo assignments as many times as

they choose in order to reach the highest desired Qualification Level.

- ◆ By following this continuous progress model that is tied to state standards and mastery of those standards, the resultant should be passage of high stakes state mandated tests and improved achievement.

### Explanation of Qualification Levels

The following levels of qualification will be used for coursework that is Satisfactory and for assessments for the HLDA/TDA Body of Evidence, which are Mastery.

- ◆ Level 3 - The student has a complete and detailed understanding of the information important to the topic, AND the student can perform the skills and processes important to the topic fluently. (**Demonstrated a deep understanding of lesson concepts**)
- ◆ Level 2 - The student has an understanding of the information important to the topic but not in great detail, AND the student can perform the skills or processes important to the topic. (**Demonstrated an adequate understanding of lesson concepts**)
- ◆ Level 1 - The student has some misconceptions or is missing some information important to the topic but still has a basic understanding of the topic, AND can perform a rough approximation of the skills and processes. (**Demonstrated a basic understanding of lesson concepts**)

The feedback below will be given to any assignment the teacher requested the student to redo because it does not meet the basic Level of Qualification listed above.

R = Rethink/Redo - The student has major misunderstandings or is missing critical information about the topic AND the student cannot perform even a rough approximation of the skills and processes important to the topic. (**Working toward an understanding of lesson concepts**)

Formative feedback is given in the form of coursework assignments. Summative feedback is given in regards to the assessments, which are archived in the TDA Body of Evidence portfolio.

The factor that will make this process so effective is that it will be visible to students and parents any time they want to log in and see it online. The almost instant access students and parents will have through our newly developed Grade Book will also provide additional feedback.

### *Section Two – Financial Reporting*

#### Total Receipts and Expenditures for FY 06

Receipts: \$772,615.00      Expenditures: \$584,391.00      Balance: \$188,224.00

## Ohio Department of Education Review

We are very proud that when ODE conducted its review for the 2006-2007 school year that no errors were found.

### Forecasting

We expect, based upon year one results and what is occurring throughout the state, that our enrollment will continue to grow. Our five-year projections are that by Fiscal Year 11 HLDA will enroll more than 118 students and our budget will exceed \$800,000.00.

## *Section Three – Faithfulness to the School’s Contract*

### Attendance

Student attendance was a critical emphasis, and we continued to refine what attendance meant in a distance-learning environment. Since students had the opportunity to “attend” school 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, documentation of their activities and contacts with their teachers was critical. We believe this was and is one of our strengths.

Students were considered “attending” if they did the following each week: contacted their teachers in a meaningful way, completed assignments, participated in online classroom related discussions, completed their online learning logs, and accessed their classroom environment. Since attendance is recorded on a weekly rather than daily basis, our attendance ranking was quite high when compared to traditional attendance criteria. We maintained a 98+% attendance rate.

Likewise, staff attendance rate was also extremely high since teachers worked from their homes. Rarely was a sick day necessary because of the flexibility of scheduling office hours. In reality many of our teachers worked nights and weekends. Thus, the traditional absence model did not adequately measure staff attendance rates for our school. Using the traditional model, our rate was again extremely high at 98+%.

### Assessment Results

03 - 04 SY was the first year of existence for HLDA. Based upon feedback from all stakeholders one of the biggest challenges was to determine how to deliver a more effective, quality online curriculum tied to state standards. To meet this challenge, we continually worked on ways to modify curriculum delivery. However, one of the most difficult issues we faced was the high level of student transience. This factor impacted our proficiency results. Also, equally important was the amount of time students were actually enrolled with us. Realistically, the proficiency results shown below are based primarily on work done in other schools. The linked data below is taken from our 2006-2007 School Year Report Card. We are very excited with our performance, but look towards continued improvement.  
[://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/000197.](http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/000197)

## **Parent and Community Involvement**

HLDA strongly encouraged parents and guardians to be actively involved in their child's education. Each student participating in our digital tract is required to attend a three hour orientation in the accompaniment of at least one parent/guardian to begin the school year. During this introduction to our online school, both students and adults were guided through a hands-on demonstration of how our school works, how students participate in their classes, and how to communicate with their teachers. Though parents did not receive their own private email accounts, they were given complete access to their child's account and were able to log in and see what work was done and the communication that was occurring between student and teacher.

An additional communication tool that was added for parents was an online grade book. This web-based program was accessible from any computer connected to the Internet.

Other communication tools for parents included toll free telephone access to the TDA Help Desk and Administrative office and to online inquiry features for parents who did not wish to use their child's account or did not have an individual email account. Parents may also contact the academy director for academic progress reports.

Students participating in our correspondence program are required to participate in an in depth orientation that covers curriculum questions, and program procedures.

## **Safe and Orderly Environment**

Being an online school required us to address safety issues in a different way. We did not need to deal with fights, assaults, and related physical violence that sometimes occur in a traditional school. However, we had to deal with cyber issues such as inappropriate materials and emails. Thus, safety was a critical part of the HLDA student environment. The provided student computers were specifically designed to work in a "closed" environment, yet allowed access to the many resources presented through the Internet. All student communication took place within the school. Students were not permitted to receive email from non-school entities. Web sites were monitored by software that was installed on each machine. Social opportunities were developed through monitored online chats and discussion boards. Providing a safe online environment was and continues to be a priority.

As in any school, there were students who abused the privileges they were afforded. This took a variety of avenues including such actions as inappropriate language when communicating with other students and teachers. All students and parent/guardians signed an *Acceptable Use Policy* when they participated in their HLDA orientations. This policy stated that they agreed to follow guidelines of appropriate use of the hardware and software. Should students violate this policy, procedures were in place to restrict their access to specific aspects of the school. Their actions sometimes resulted in suspension from school by turning off access. TRECA's Dean of Students worked closely with students and parents when such situations arose. All disciplinary action was documented for future reference if needed.

While there are many reasons that students and parents choose to participate in an online school, we know from parent feedback that one is the desire for a safer environment than experienced in the previous school. We worked hard to meet those expectations for a safe school.

### Special Needs and Support

As per Ohio Law, special needs students admitted to the program were served in educationally appropriate ways, without discrimination. A special education supervisor coordinated and oversaw appropriate educational services. The current Ohio Model of Policies and Procedures was adopted by the LDA Board of Directors.

### Collegiality and Professionalism

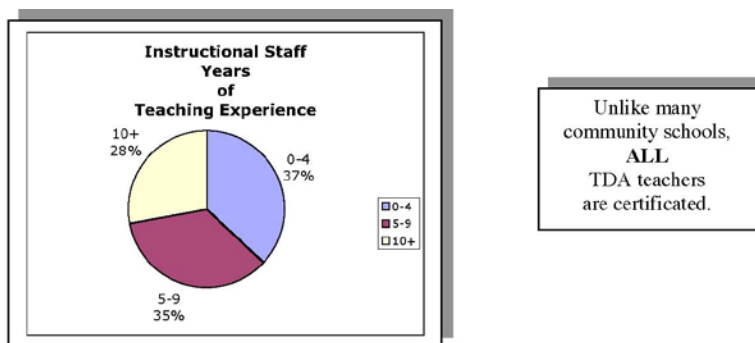
Just as students worked from their homes, so did the teaching staff. Each month, the entire teaching staff gathered together for an intense inservice day. At these meetings, teachers learned new skills, discussed processes for assessment and student support, collaborated with colleagues, and worked on developing appropriate curriculum and activities for students. We believe this face-to-face interaction was critical to our success. Also, between meetings, the staff had online access to many support structures including conferences, discussion boards, and administrative email support.

Teachers were required to post the instructional times they were available for immediate feedback and chats with students. However, many teachers went beyond the required time frames as they worked with students. High school teachers were required to provide at least one evening of scheduled support time. While not required, many teachers were available on weekends as well.

TDA supported the teaching staff by providing for the Praxis certification, participation in the Local Professional Development Committee, and support of certification and license renewal and upgrading. Teachers were involved in discussions regarding curriculum expectations, aligning their curriculum to the Grade Level Indicators as required by the Ohio Department of Education, and enhancing student support structures.

### Teaching Staff

Below is a breakdown of the years of teaching experience for the 57 instructional staff members used by TDA. HLDA uses primarily TDA staff for student instruction.



## Planning

In closing, our Board of Directors, Administration and TDA Staff are committed to the following for 2007-2008:

- We will move toward a continuous progress model. (Please see the detailed explanation under Section One. Also, this process should generate a substantial increase in student achievement.)
- We will continue to work at reducing the student/teacher ratio. (We learned that because of the time intensity of email communications that class sizes need to be reduced.)
- We will continue to examine hardware and software for dependability. (The hardware/software issues greatly impact curriculum delivery and student success.)
- Because of the diversity of our population and our commitment to provide the best online education, we will continue to modify program, delivery, and instruction in order to increase student achievement and to prepare them for the world of work and a democratic society.
- We will continue to provide additional services for students participating in all of our tracts so that they may be better prepared for state testing.