



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

We welcome you to review our annual report for the 2005 - 2006 school year. The Hamilton Local Digital Academy (HLDA)/Hamilton Alternative Academy (HAA), sponsored by the Hamilton Local School District, officially opened its doors on September 15, 2003. Our primary purpose is to offer the highest quality alternative educational program available. The information that follows provides a statistical and narrative overview of our school during the past school year. We are pleased with the continued strides we have made and look forward to continued improvement.

### **NOW AND THE FUTURE**

To address key issues regarding student performance garnered from data collected during the 2004-2005 school year, we have 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. You will read more about this later in the report. For SY 04 - 05 we introduced a year round school calendar. This approach has allowed our students the greatest learning flexibility as well as the ability to provide greater ongoing academic support. This past summer, we had over 60 students participate in summer credit recovery.

During the 2004-2005 school year, we also began offering a second tract for High School students through the American School program. This program allowed our secondary student who were unable to maintain pace in our digital, computer based program, to work in a more familiar atmosphere. This program also provided for a very strong credit recovery program with over 150 students participating.

We at HLDA/HAA 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/HAA 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.

## **Letter from the Executive Director – William Morrison**

Hamilton Local Digital Academy/Alternative Academy embarked on its initial year of existence on September 15, 2003. As we continued to understand and develop an educationally sound online school environment, the year was one of changes and challenges. During the 2004-2005 school year, we became a "mixed" or "blended" environment with the addition of our correspondence program and alternative academy. Our student population increased almost twofold and the inquiries about this school option continued to abound. Through data and information collected,

we revised our technical environment and curriculum to better meet the needs of our students. Our correspondence program has allowed secondary students to work in a more familiar environment. Our alternative academy has allowed home schooled students who need additional assistance, the ability to work with an instructor face-to-face. Our teachers worked diligently to provide as much individual attention as possible and to guide students through the state required curriculum. There were many challenges, but these helped enhance our school as we continued to grow and improve.

During the 2005-2006 school year, we have worked diligently at providing additional support for students who are in jeopardy of not being successful in the digital environment and thus, may opt out of school all together. This approach included a separate intervention program for students in danger of falling behind academically. We are also offering tutoring services for students who need additional assistance in particular curriculum areas. Secondly, we have moved our curriculum approach towards a model where knowledge, not time, is the driving force. These two areas will be critical as we approach the start of school in this fall.

HLDA/HAA continues to offer a unique opportunity to students who have decided that an alternative education is a valid choice. I know I speak for the entire HLDA/HAA staff when I say that it is exciting to be part of an organization that is serious about providing a great educational opportunity.

Should you have questions, please contact me at [wmorrison@hamilton-local.k12.oh.us](mailto:wmorrison@hamilton-local.k12.oh.us) or call (614) 491-5546.

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

The State Model Courses of Study are the basis for HLDA 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. During the 2005-2006 year, our digital students have moved up to the Angel environment. The HLDA 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. Communication can come in many forms including: e-mail, home visits, office visits, phone calls. Each student must present a minimum of one examination each week to meet our attendance policy.

We now also feature two alternative academies, each with a full-time instructor that provides classroom instruction to our alternative students as well as tutoring and assistance for correspondence students.

## ***Section Two – Financial Reporting***

The Hamilton Digital Academy/Alternative Academy was last audited on December 28, 2005 with no findings.

### **Total Receipts and Expenditures for FY 06**

**Receipts: \$267,155.60**

**Expenditures: \$190,485.94**

**Balance: \$264,893.16**

### **Ohio Department of Education Review**

We are very proud that when ODE conducted its initial review for the 2003-04 school year that no errors were found.

### **Forecasting**

We expect, based upon our continued growth and what is occurring throughout the state that our enrollment will continue to increase. Our five-year projections are that by Fiscal Year 09 HLDA will enroll more than 90 students and our budget will exceed \$1,000,000.00.

## ***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+%.

Attendance for our alternative program is measured as per public school district policy. Each student identified as an Alternative Classroom student attends a separate facility within a sponsoring school building. Our district truancy officer is in daily contact with these students and provides parents with multiple opportunities to participate in various parenting and family related programs that help maintain appropriate daily attendance.

Attendance for our correspondence program, as discussed earlier, is measured by communication and academic output. Each student must communicate with our office weekly and provide a minimum of one examination to be considered present.

## **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. Because this was our first full year as a “Start-Up” district, data regarding state indicators were not available. With this in mind, I have linked both the 2005-2006 report card and the 2004-2005 report card.

[-2006 Report](#)

[-2005 Report](#)

## **Parent and Community Involvement**

HLDA/HAA 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 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.

### **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.

### **Planning**

In closing, our Board of Directors, Administration and Staff are committed to the following for 06 - 07:

- 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 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.