

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

TRANSFORMATION TO QUALITY STUDY

Roma Independent School District and Center for Applied Research In Education
(CARE) **J. R. Llanes, Principal Investigator**

[Research Staff](#)

© Copyright- Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE), The University of Texas Pan-American 1996. All rights are reserved by copyright, except that authors retain intellectual property rights to their articles and may republish their articles in other publications. This Report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-profit use for the purposes of education, research, library reference, stored or distributed as a public service by any networked computer. Any commercial use of this Report in whole or in part by any means is strictly prohibited without written permission. Any use of this Report in whole or in part, including by authors, should include customary bibliographic citation, including author attribution, data, article title, edition, and electronic retrieval instruction. <http://www.care.panam.edu/center/roma.html>

The Community

Roma is a small community of 8,000 people, located in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, in an area where European settlements have existed for over 300 years. Roma is located just across the Rio Grande River from the city of Miguel Aleman, Mexico (pop. 49,000). On the other side of the Border over a million people live and work within a 50 mile-radius. On this side of the Border, fewer than 100,000 people reside. The early settlers to Roma consisted primarily of Spanish and later Mexican descendants of Spanish. The non-Hispanic population in the area never amounted to more than 5%, even in the days when Fort Ringgold Army Base (15 miles east) was fully functional.

Economics

Roma ISD employs about 35% of the population of Roma, and serves over 60% of the households. This makes the school district a very important part of the community, beyond the school district's usual importance as a cultural institution. There's currently a 32% unemployment rate in the county, which has had a grave impact upon the local economy. About 30% of the employment is derived from its proximity to Mexico. The bridge from Miguel Aleman is crossed daily by over 10,000 people coming to Roma and environs, and compared with purchases made by local Roma residents, the visitors from Miguel Aleman provided in 1994, 70% of the retail trade. Even today (December 1995) with economic conditions in Mexico being very uncertain, trade with Mexicans account for over half of the volume in the local retail stores. The balance of the employment is provided by ranching, agriculture, other public agencies and self-employment.

The Schools Roma ISD is among the poorest of the school districts in Texas and is receiving aid from the State and federal government in order to supplement local funds and provide some fiscal equity. Roma ISD's student enrollment is approximately 5,747 with seven campuses providing pre-K through 12th grade instruction.

Table 1. Roma Independent School District Campus Enrollment Count 1995.

Name of School	Grade s	Enrollment
Roma High School	9-12	1,514
Roma Middle School	6-8	1,339
Roma Intermediate School	4-5	850
Scott Elementary School	K-3	558
Vera Elementary School	K-3	549
Barrera Elementary School	K-3	544
Los Saenz Elementary School	EE-PK	393

Roma ISD's students mobility rates were 16.6 percent for high school students (93/94=17.3%), 13 percent for the middle school (93/94=14.2%), 12.5 percent for the intermediate school (93/94=11.6%), and 15.7 percent for the elementary schools (93/94=14%). Many students (about 25%) may be labeled 'at risk' from dropping out of school, since they leave before the school year is over, and are not back for the school at its start in the Fall. This shorter academic year places the migrant workers' students at an academic disadvantage.

Governance

Roma is governed by a seven-person School Board. Before 1993 individual members of the School Board had been in place an average of 22 years, and the Superintendent had served 17 years in the position. The system's leadership had instituted a top-down control of the system which allowed for little individual freedom, little professional control of curriculum and methods, very little continuing education for teachers and administrators and a dearth of creativity. Compliance processes such as the classification and education of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students was haphazard and enjoyed no policy guidance. As a result thousands of children made it through 9 years of schooling without becoming Full English Proficient (FEP). About 60% of all students failed all TAAS tests and over the past ten years fewer than 1% of the graduates of Roma High School completed more than two years of college.

Change in Governance

It was in May of 1993 that the majority of the Board changed, spurred by a group of parents who had grown tired of the lack of success of the students in Roma, and they proposed to do something about it. In March of 1994 a new Superintendent was selected and a mandate given to him by the Board to re-organize and re-structure the system so as to provide 1) greater degree of control by Site-Based Decision-Making teams, 2) a reliance upon Performance as the measure of success as opposed to Compliance, 3) an improvement in the quality of education for all Romans, and 4) the creation of a "world-class" system of education for Roma.

Research Questions

The Board asked CARE to undertake some primaryresearch questions which are enumerated below. From these questions others grew and the Superintendent added

to the list. The Board was interested in learning the following:

Question 1:

What results of restructuring have become evident after the School Board and the Superintendent implemented new policies for 1994?

Question 2:

Have the new policies resulted in new initiatives that seem to be promising?

Question 3:

What are the urgent issues the School Board needs to consider in order to improve the quality of education at Roma?

Question 4:

Will Roma High School show improvement in TAAS scores and in other academic ways over the long term?

We will take each question in turn and provide a summary of the data we have gathered and the analyses we have made on each question separately.

Question 1:

What results of restructuring have become evident after the School Board and the Superintendent implemented new policies for 1994?

- New policies have shifted the decision-making and responsibility to lower levels in the administration.

Decentralization and Site-Based Management

Roma Independent School District (Roma ISD) is in the early stages of implementing a new SBDM organizational structure, in an attempt to lower the level of decision-making (SBDM) makers and to comply with State Laws on the governance of schools through SBDM. The early stages of this process produced different outcomes in the different settings in which it was implemented. The High School took its site-based management mandate to heart and implemented many innovations the first year. The Middle School and some Elementary schools were less pro-active in their first year. Further re-structuring might be required before all campuses operate effectively with their own SBDMs. The direction of change in this area is toward lower levels of decision-makers in some areas.

- There is a focus on performance, not just compliance.

From Compliance to Outcomes-based Management

A major complaint from the new Board was the extent the schools used Compliance-based methods, which justified low rates of achievement and ignored the actual lack of performance demonstrated by the students. The State's testing program provided Roma ISD with methods of assessing its impact through repeated standardized measures. The state-mandated program also provided rules that excluded some students (Special Education and LEP) from taking the statewide test, the TAAS. This exclusion rule, while inspired by the logic that only English-speaking students would understand the English TAAS, has led to a condition where, on the average, Roma ISD elementary schools exclude about 75% of its 3rd grade population (all LEP) from the state-wide measure. Under the "Compliance" system, the scores of the 25% of the Elementary students who are Fully English Proficient and therefore take the test, (reported as percentage of passing for the whole school) show a more favorable picture of the school's accomplishment than is in fact the case. The new Board wanted every student to be educated and directed the Superintendent to set high educational expectations toward the attainment of 90% passing rates for all students in all schools. The Board left the matter of implementation entirely in the hands of Mr. Watson. As will be discussed later, he chose to deal with this issue by setting the groundwork for continuous improvement of the system, and has begun to put in place some systemwide changes.

- The amount of innovation has increased in most campuses.

Improving Quality of Education

The new Superintendent Mr. Watson began the process of Continuous Quality Improvement in Roma before he had a name for it. He opened the doors to experimentation on the part of principals and teachers, and lent support with travel funds and time-off requests of school personnel, who could visit other sites in order to determine the bases of their success (benchmarking), as well as enabled others to begin curricular alignment to state standards (setting standards) while allowing SBDM teams and principals greater say in the academic and program decisions (team management). Thus, by the time CARE became involved with the district, a few of the characteristics of quality systems had already been implemented and, as we would later discover, with great success in some areas.

- Administrators feel free to act.

Why not?

Mr. Watson's policies have resulted in that site administrators and others feel free to act. One principal commented, that Mr. Watson's "favorite question is 'why not' and to me that means 'go do it'." This is in contrast to both, the previous system of work where the superintendent directed every move, and the system of work which is also prevalent in public schools and in particular schools in agricultural areas such as Roma. The freedom for educators to act seems to be, within this culture, a bit too much freedom. The culture mandates that rules be put in place and followed for every school activity. The present Board and Superintendent have resisted the temptation to dictate and force compliance. This has resulted in that administrators report greater willingness to lead, by selecting strategies and methods for the attainment of their goals. The Board and Superintendent have responded by providing the budget for these activities.

- As a result, the performance of the District as a whole has improved.

TAAS passing levels improved dramatically in the 10th grade last year and will record small gains this year, as the innovation's effect begins to settle. Drop-out rates have been halved and recovery rates for drop-outs have doubled. There has been a significant improvement in the number of those attending 4-year higher education institutions, and a dramatic improvement in those expecting to attend 2-year community colleges, when capacity is available later this year. In enacting the policies that led to Mr. Watson being named Superintendent, the Board expressed its desire to empower the staff of the district to perform to the best of their abilities. The Board placed the burden of proof that the staff was doing its work not in terms of policy compliance issues but in terms of student performance issues. These messages have been well received and interpreted in just the way the Board had hoped.

Long-term Challenge

Policies must evolve into systems of work if the policy mandates are to remain and improve the system. This is the challenge now, to correctly build a system of work that would guarantee each learner an equitable share of the district's attention, and to forge a school-wide and system-wide culture of learning and continuous improvement, which can eventually overcome the most difficult barriers in the way of creating such a cultural change. The process of quality improvement takes time. The dramatic beginning should not blind us to the hard work and countless personal sacrifices that lie ahead. There are persistent problems that have to be given new and creative answers. There's much experimentation ahead and not all of it will work. The community and the schools will have to continue their march toward one another and become more effective in meeting the needs of learners, but the process has begun.

Question 2:

Have the new policies resulted in new initiatives that seem to be promising?

- The school district has begun to adapt a quality system.

Mr. Watson's Quality System

Mr. Watson has begun to define his own quality system. It begins with a focus on the learner, every learner, and the home and schooling environments these learners inhabit. Mr. Watson articulates that both these environments must blend, come closer together, rally around the learner and create an environment which is a combination of both. His vision of quality improves educational opportunities for the community as well. In his vision, parents become organized, better informed, educated in English or Spanish, volunteer in meaningful ways, become employed by the system to serve the learners at pre-professional levels, participate in sports and performances of students, support school events and activities, keep the learners focused in school and academics and more. In Mr. Watson's vision schools are places where individuals grow and mature, they are models of human behavior in a

democratic society.

He prescribes for these environments that they be rich cultural environments with educated teachers who are models of learning themselves. He's brought computers, communications, global access, increased higher education opportunities, individualized attention, concern for the whole person, open access to community and parents. He intends to benchmark every school in the system with at least two other schools who are using quality systems and show world-class performance in graduation rates, academic achievements and successful higher education participation.

He intends to prepare teachers in Roma's system of work and in technical areas which are identified through performance evaluation of teachers working as teams. The definitions of quality outcomes will come from the client. While community and parents are increasingly more involved in school activities they have yet to be addressed as clients of the system in order to discover their definitions of quality education. At the present time the client is thought to want increased school performance and improved performance for their children in tests.

- The community has begun to become more involved in school activities.

Community Involvement

An early goal of this administration has begun to pay off. The number of parents attending a recent district-wide dinner honoring students numbered 400, a pep rally for the football team yielded 1,500 people, there are 65 parents serving as volunteers, 40 parents in parent tutorial programs. The district's reconverted school bus brings computers and other technology to the remotest neighborhoods and new links are being forged between isolated ranchos and colonias and the learning resources of the school district. All these programs have great potential for expansion and will contribute to the quality of education for children in indirect ways which are currently lacking.

- Roma High School has led innovation with sound strategies which have enjoyed success.

Roma High School

High's new Copernican model (also called Block Scheduling) has been successfully implemented, and was pointed to by students and faculty as the most important innovation in the schools for that year. We have also researched the way Roma High chose to put the model in place and this information is contained in section IV of this report. Other schools are beginning to imitate the actions of Roma, finding successful programs that can be adapted to meet needs. This is a new activity for the system (coming from the recent past) and it looks very promising.

- An increased commitment to staff development.

Staff Development

The amount and diversity of the staff training has increased dramatically over the first two years. A 300% increase in the number of teachers attending workshops, and a doubling of the workshops being offered on site are, but a few, indicators of

this emphasis.

- A commitment has been made to build more schools.

More School Buildings

This Board's actions to build more schools, which were supported by the Superintendent and the community, constitute a very important long-term commitment to quality of education. The large and overcrowded schools will soon be a thing of the past in Roma, and with this improved environment the Board can expect better performance results.

- There has been an increase in the success of cultural and sports activities.

Successful Cultural and Sports Activities

A winning team can be an indication of quality factors at work, particularly when those most responsible for the increased success of the sports activity have been hired under contracts which cause them to focus on widening participation for all students, increasing community and parental participation and support, and other factors relating to the image and self concept of the team. The success is so widespread that the responsibility for this change must be systemic and not isolated. This spirit of success inspired by athletics and other extracurricular endeavors, translates into improved quality of the instructional climate in the schools.

- There is a move toward building a world class school system for Roma.

A World-Class School System for Roma

It was the Board's former President most fervent hope that Roma would somehow evolve a world class system of schooling, as good as any in the world, to prepare world class citizens, even if they still live in Roma the rest of their lives. What Mr. Arnoldo Guerra articulated is beginning to take shape. Today's world class standards for schools come from the New Educational Standards Project and Roma needs to adopt them as the state of Texas does. Yet the reality of Roma's financial instability became clear this year (1996) as schools opened with a large and uncollectable property tax deficit that forced the district to layoff 140 staff members, mostly those who had been added to create new programs with parents and community. It was planned that next year Roma students would participate in several events in foreign countries in Asia and Europe, and also establish new exchanges with Mexican schools. At this time all those plans are on hold while the district deals with its fiscal emergency and tries to rescue its quality initiatives.

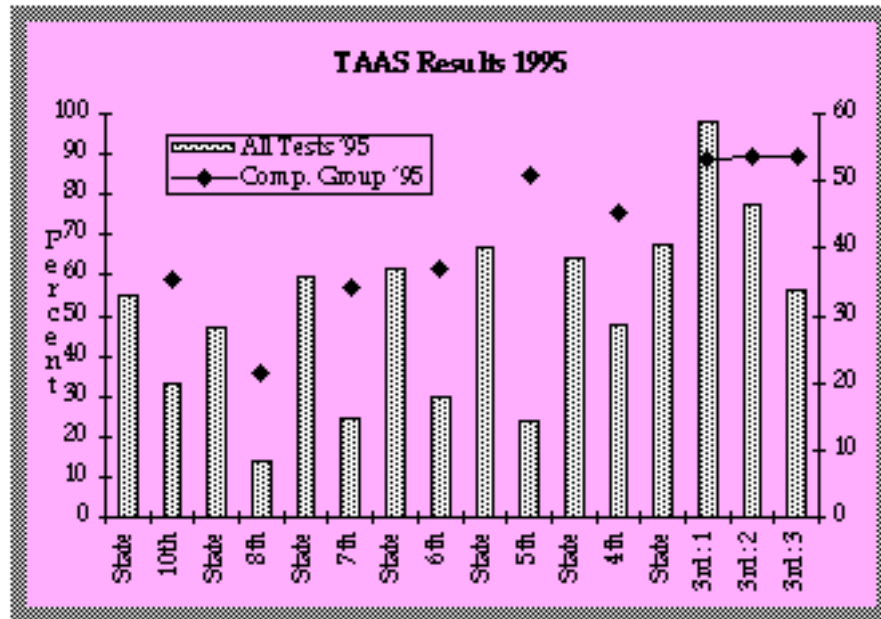
Question 3:

What are the urgent issues the School Board needs to consider in order to improve the quality of education at Roma?

Persistent Problems

The World Class system of education which Roma wants to evolve must address persistent problems with the successful education of the majority of Romans. The following Figure 1 shows that most of Roma ISD's learners score below State averages as well as the average of its own TEA-determined Comparison Group on the TAAS test.

Figure 1. TAAS results by grade compared to statewide and comparison group



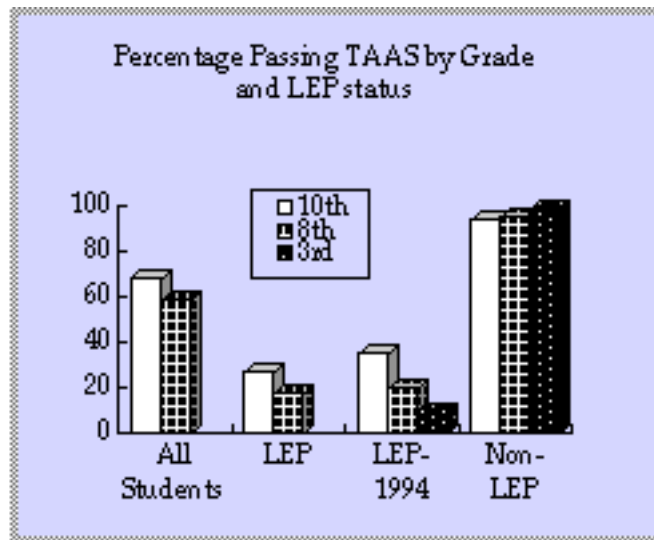
Under the old system, high levels of district effort would have been devoted to remediate this condition and to teach directly the skills needed in the TAAS test. That type of remediation contributes only in small measure to the solution of the accumulated problem. Instead a complete restructuring of the system must take place. The TAAS passing rates improved this last year district-wide, primarily as a result of the first wave of decentralization which saw schools begin to experiment with new approaches. The High School adopted the Copernican Model of Block Scheduling which has been credited with being responsible for focusing staff on new instructional approaches and facilitating student activities and resulting in better understanding of materials. Schools have also begun to more closely align their curriculum and approaches to the objectives of the TAAS and this has improved the passing rates of students. But in order to break through the structural achievement barriers facing Roma's students, a radical approach to Bilingual Education and a new system of work is required.

The Language Issue

To illustrate the impact of Roma's unique linguistic environment upon its schools and learners, let us take a look at the average scores of students taking the TAAS, when the factor of limited English language proficiency is accounted for. As can be seen below, the percentage of those passing the TAAS who are classified as LEP (but

"non-excludable" from testing) is significantly below (10 to 27%) the passing rate of those who are FEP (96%) as well as below the average for all students (60%). It can also be noted that those students who were reclassified (from LEP to FEP) in 1994 and took the TAAS in 1995, also have a very poor passing rate (10 to 35%). However, students who were reclassified as FEP two or more years before the test was given, as well as those who were never LEP, pass the TAAS at rates over 90%.

Figure 2. Effect of LEP and recent LEP on achievement rates.



This clearly indicates that the district should focus its resources toward achieving fully bilingual students as a 100% outcome objective for perhaps the Third grade, beginning in Kindergarten, and that this must be accomplished using a radically different approach than the one currently in place.

Linguistic Factors

CARE focused its research attention upon language use patterns in the community in order to determine the degree to which the teaching of the English language (or the use of English as primary or only media of instruction) would be supported by community and home language use patterns. The central question that emerged from preliminary data was..."Is there enough English, in the natural language use pattern of the homes and community where Roma's students live and socialize, to support an English-only or primarily-English system of instruction?" It was clear that the unique linguistic condition of Roma was somehow tied to the low passing rates of students, and sometimes persisted to induce failure in higher education. Roma needed a new understanding of its linguistic condition, and a plan to improve performance by using the linguistic strengths of the community and developing others.

Where's the English?

Linguists have no measure for how widespread the use of a language in a given

community must be to amount to "enough" to support and provide what they call "functional power" to the language being taught in school. It is generally agreed that the language taught in school must have a "demand" in the community either in intra-family discourse, or after-school activities, or entertainment, or in any other important and well attended community activity. If there's no demand for the language in the community, the language being taught is best classified as a "foreign language" and the methods in use as well as the goals to be attained in a foreign language are typically quite different than in the usual "English as Second Language" situation in the United States. ESL programs most often serve immigrant populations in cities where English is supported through all manner of community activity. In these environments, the linguists fear loss of the first language, or "language shift" because societal characteristics of the second language are usually so strong that they obliterate all but a few foreign languages in a generation.

In the case of Roma the situation is reversed. Our findings indicate that the English language is not supported by either commerce or community activities and can be found in regular use only in classrooms of the school district and in the district's central office and other public and health agencies. English is a minority language in Roma and as such it is used to communicate with members of the English-monolingual minority group and for the performance of school or work activities mostly outside of Roma. As a minority language in this community, English must be protected and developed if it is to serve to provide "functional power" to the English language teaching of the schools.

Conversely, Spanish is the language of preference in Roma, it is supported by commerce and community activities, the press, radio, television and the churches. While approximately 70% of the people whose language use was surveyed by our team spoke English, their language use was predominantly Spanish or mixed-media Spanish/English. Few who were not English monolingual spoke English most of the time and those could be almost always found in the school district buildings. That's where the English is and while it resides mainly or only in the school, is not able to provide the "functional power" which students in other valley schools would find in their communities.

Educational Significance

The important finding of this research is that the school district is predominantly or exclusively teaching its academic material in English while the community's linguistic reality is either bilingual or Spanish. This incongruence must be addressed before the schools will be able to perform to the levels sought by the Board and the Superintendent.

System of Work

In order to deliver quality uniformly throughout the school district, a system of work must evolve which embodies the characteristic of continuous quality improvement. These systems of work are being evolved at The University of Texas Pan American and through Continuing Education programs led by CARE will begin to emerge as working models. The system of work being evolved will require changes in policies of the school system, changes in the goals for the system and a gradual but massive restructuring of instructional organization. In order to begin a new system of work,

the schools will be preparing models and taking training on systems design. Working at the system level will enable staff to make connections within grades, from grade to grade, from school to school and systemwide. It will enable the school district to put in place a continuous improvement process. It will also help train incoming personnel to the system of work for the district and school and bring new staff into high productivity levels quickly.

Community School Partnerships

Almost all problems the school faces can be solved through appropriate community participation. Drugs, gangs, and other external forces will continue to bring problems into the schools, and the solutions are not within the schools. Parents need to take greater responsibility for the learner and his/her quality of life and they also need help and support from the schools. Current efforts in helping parents take responsibility for their children are working to increase parental involvement and need to be expanded to encompass every student and his/her parent or guardian.

Increase School to Work Efforts

Roma High School maintains a largely academic program but the majority of its graduates do not intend to graduate from a university. Ninety percent of the high school graduates must find a job after high school and this is no small chore in the Rio Grande Valley. The majority of the graduates that emerge from the high school have few marketable skills above the minimum wage level. Some will leave town to find work but without additional training --technical, sales, office work-- they will not find a good job. Roma ISD needs to look at its School-to-Work transition and provide low cost but highly effective programs that will enable students to become acquainted with a trade, or a technical skill, and the culture of employment. Self employment--entrepreneurship, Junior Achievement--should not be overlooked as potential school-to-work activity.

Vocational and Technical programs should be viewed as entry-level preparation for specific jobs in the greater Valley area. In the past vocational and technical programs were dumping grounds for minorities and "tracking" became the popular term to describe that condition. But just because a High School takes time to prepare a student for a working life does not mean that opportunities are not available for students to go to college if they so desire. The great difference is that they will have the ability to earn a wage while going to college.

Question 4:

Will Roma High School succeeded in increasing TAAS scores and in other academic ways over the long term?

Last Spring the Board received the pleasant news that 10th graders in 1995 had a 46% TAAS passing rate in math, and 53% TAAS passing rate in reading compared to the 20% passing rate in math and 38% in reading when they were in eighth grade. This was important reversal after many years of failure but the Board, rather than patting itself in the back and hoping for the best, had the wisdom to ask why Roma High had succeeded now, when previously it had failed.

Taking advantage of opportunities

One of the secrets of Roma High's new success lies in taking advantage of opportunities. Mr. Watson opened the door to innovation and named a new Principal who was ready and well suited for the task. He brought about a changed climate and this changed climate at Roma High is primarily responsible for the successful TAAS outcomes noted.

This changed climate was described by one student as "Going from rules, rules, rules, to new things, new things, new things." Mr. Guerra focused on structural change factors (scheduling and curriculum) and on leadership factors (team development) and his main tools.

He also promoted greater parental and community participation and brought a new morale to the student body, partially through exhortation, partially through commitment to them and this resulted in early success, in academics, in performing arts, in sports and in other important areas and this success was celebrated by the school, the district and the community and now this success is part of the expectations the community has of the school. In Section IV we present a review of the data we collected in Roma High and a complete analysis of what happened there. In this Executive Summary we would like to summarize those data and events.

Block Scheduling

The motivation to go into a block schedule derived from the need to develop new high school courses to meet the mandated increase of up to 24 credit hours required for graduation. As it turned out, choosing Block Scheduling and successfully implementing a comprehensive school change strategy were key elements in the success of Roma students in the 1995 TAAS. The Block Scheduling model Roma High selected for study and adoption was the Fort Worth model which is the first Block Scheduling model in Texas and works very well. Adoption of Block Scheduling has helped in a number of ways. For example. Discipline management is much easier, the number of referrals dropped 30% the first year. There's more time to focus on areas (such as TAAS preparation) and the longer schedule creates a demand for more content and more concentrated content.

Led to Curriculum Modifications

Roma's Principal motivated curriculum modifications effectively within the school by successfully adopting the Block Scheduling which created a demand for new curriculum to account for the doubling of time available. New courses emerged and more advanced content within the existing courses began to evolve. Sophomores (in 1994-95) now had to enroll in one English and one math course (geometry or algebra II and English II) in the fall in addition to two electives. This was greeted by the students with a mixture of dread and anticipation. "I didn't know if I could do geometry and it took the long period of block scheduling to convince me. Next year I was doing AP."

TAAS Prep and Curriculum were blended

The content areas as well as the (10th grade) TAAS objectives were incorporated, and the students' progress was assessed weekly through testing. One TAAS objective was blended into the curriculum each week. One facilitator in each area helped by supplementing the faculty's work, helping identify resources and enriching the curriculum. They saw to it that one TAAS objective was mastered per week and conducted formative evaluations to assess progress. Data on the entire sophomore class was gathered weekly. In January 1995 the students began a nine week long TAAS course, where they developed their skills in math for 45 minutes and then reading for 45 minutes per day. They were tested on one objective biweekly until the TAAS test was given. The strongest teachers are selected to teach the sophomore classes in math and English.

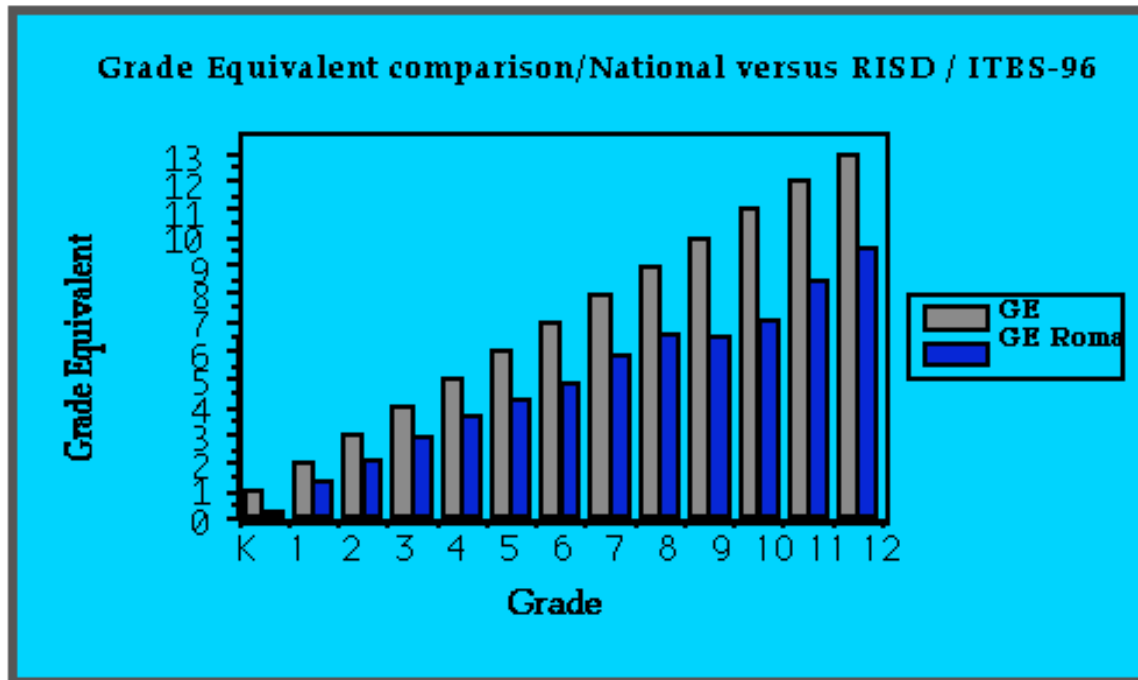
The Faculty

No doubt the faculty is the most important element in any quality improvement effort. Faculties work best in supportive environments where they are happy and enthusiastic about their work. They must transmit to students a positive view of self and learning and this is best accomplished by people who feel very good about themselves. The leadership of the new principal has had a great deal to do with creating a positive environment for faculty and students alike. The great TAAS results discussed earlier were brought about by a closely collaborating group of professionals who feel great about the school, the students and their jobs. This in turn has transferred over to the students. Roma High School has also begun to invest in the training of its faculty and the faculty who attend conferences and workshops have been very good about disseminating the information in a presentation forum to their colleagues. Not all faculty at Roma High are happy and productive. Our research focused on the people who worked directly with the sophomores and with others who sought us out. We need to return next year and take a more comprehensive look at how Roma High has begun to consolidate its gains and prepare for the next phase of its goal achievement. Yet at this time we can point at the above measures as concrete examples of how the climate of change and innovation has begun to produce results. Roma High now needs to consolidate its gains and this is the year for that to begin.

A long way to go

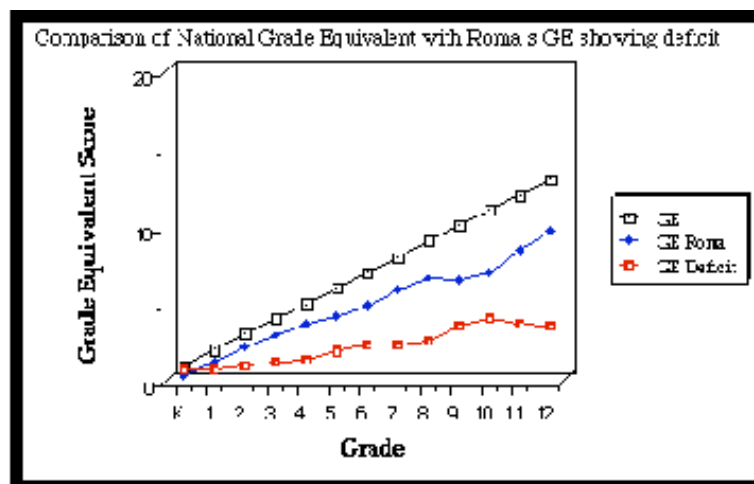
The people of Roma are not easily discouraged by daunting challenges or reverses. The community has withstood droughts, wars and pestilence and has continued to survive. But this community would like to go beyond survival to a level of achievement which would make Romans fully participating citizens. Roma has a long way to go.

In the following chart we show a comparison between the average grade equivalent grade of Roma students (K-12) and the national average as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).



As can be seen the average of the grade equivalency scores in Roma is significantly below the grade equivalent for the nation. This deficit begins in Kindergarten (a deficit of .7 (or 7 months), increases to .9 by Third grade, and increases again every year until the Tenth grade when the deficit reaches 4.0 (or a full four years behind the national norm). In the two years of senior High School, the deficit declines, with the average student graduating Roma High School, about 3.4 years behind the national norm.

In order for Roma High School to close the gap successfully, the system must change at the early elementary levels in order to produce a higher level of academic attainment in those early grades. Language use and a curriculum which is both articulated and comprehensive is needed. Middle schools must work to improve on the elementary school's record rather than allow the pattern of underachievement to enlarge. These are the challenges facing the system.



The above Grade Equivalency Deficit, must be to 0 turned into a surplus before we can say that Romans have established a world class system.

The staff and teachers of Roma have been working very hard for the past two years to bring to the children a caring and humane school experience and they have succeeded at ending the isolation of the school in the community. New schools have been built and spaces refurbished and now there are adequate facilities in which to carry out the work of the transformation to quality. In order to reach the national average performance Romans will have to account for and take advantage of linguistic conditions in the community and schools. Roma is now facing new fiscal constraints that must also be overcome. It must build a new system of work based on quality principles with less money. Moreover, within the next few years the educators, parents and community of Roma will have to evolve a stronger partnership, focusing on the educational and social needs of its youth.

This is a tall order but Romans are up to the challenge, to keep the hope alive and to work on continuous improvement so that one day Roma may achieve its goal to be as good as any school district in the world.