Summary of Interviews of Administrators

Regions 10 and 11 Pilots, 2011-12

Mary Harris, July 9, 2012

1. **Methodology**

Eight administrators from Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Brookhaven College, Tarrant County College, and the University of North Texas were interviewed in June, 2012, by Mary Harris about their perception of the work of the AVATAR pilot teams. The three school district administrators who were interviewed were in the roles of central office secondary content leader and/or professional development leader. The five higher education administrators who were interviewed were in the roles of department chair, dean, assistant vice chancellor, and associate vice president with responsibilities in academic affairs, career and college readiness and/or outreach. Interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted no more than 30 minutes.

The questions asked in the interview were:

1. How has the work of the AVATAR Project come to your attention in the past year?
2. Are you aware of plans for continued discussion of vertical alignment of the curriculum, and what do you see as the benefits of this work along with the barriers?
3. What are your recommendations for future alignment work that crosses high school and 2- and 4-year colleges?
4. How would you like to be involved in our August 13 state-wide conference on this topic?
5. **Findings**

Findings are summarized for K-12 and higher education.

The K-12 administrators described how they had become aware of the AVATAR Project and what they did to identify participants and to be informed of their work. In one district, the administrators had attended an orientation meeting at the beginning of the project. In both school districts, these central office administrators were more informed about the continuing work of AVATAR by the ESC facilitator/coordinator than by the vertical alignment team participants. The informants said that they knew or thought K-12 participants had talked with their principals, who, in one district, were both being transferred to other assignments. All informants were supportive of the work of vertical alignment with higher education. Two cited dual credit as the primary impetus for this work. Another emphasized the need for high school juniors and seniors to know what to expect when they get to college. Barriers cited included lack of time to talk, the difficulty of organizing cross-institutional teams, the rush of deadlines, and differences in the cultures of K-12 and higher education. One talked about the need to expand this work to other disciplines, and another, the need to extend vertical alignment to middle school. One plans to be at the August 13 meeting.

Two of the higher education administrators had attended the same meeting described by the K-12 administrators. One of the administrators received continuous updates about the AVATAR Project at meetings of the North Texas Regional P-16 Council and its executive committee. Another administrator was involved in facilitating the vertical alignment team meetings that were held on the college campus and had attended the sessions as an observer and, at times, a participant. Two of the administrators, the department chair and the dean, were regularly informed about the work of AVATAR by the faculty who were participating. One was involved with the implementation of reference course profiles in core courses of the department. One had engaged the vertical alignment participants in leadership of departmental and college professional development about expectations of students as they move from high school to college. The college administrators noted the following as challenges of vertical alignment work: finding time to meet; developing honesty and trust in a cross-institutional working group; providing data to support recommendations to the institution; and the difficulty of aligning curriculum across multiple community college campuses in one district, between colleges and their multiple feeder school districts, and across the multiple high schools of each school district.

Recommendations of the college administrators for the future work of AVATAR were that

1. Higher education institutions should be represented in this work by full time faculty.
2. Meet at one another’s setting, not always in one place.
3. Have more clarity about roles and goals at the beginning.
4. Colleges need to be strategic about working with high schools. Local data about the performance of their students in college can help.
5. Focus this effort on mathematics and on participation by school districts where mathematics scores are below the state average and by colleges that are successful in remediation.
6. Be respectful of decisions made by high schools about instructional approaches that may be culturally responsive to student populations.
7. Early college high school and dual credit are good sources of information about local alignment.

Two of the college administrators said they would be at or would like to be invited to the August 13 meeting, and one provided contact information for another administrator who could contribute.

1. **Conclusions**

Of the eight administrators interviewed, four were well informed about the work of AVATAR. The others were supportive of vertical alignment in general but had not been directly involved with AVATAR after start-up. The four most informed participants were all from higher education. K-12 administrators were more informed by ESC personnel than by participants. Well-informed higher education administrators tended to be in academic affairs and to have a line relationship with the participants. The higher education administrators had good recommendations for future work with vertical alignment. Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4 are especially pertinent to the AVATAR experience.

There is a need for both line administrators (principals, department chairs, deans) and central office or central administration curriculum leaders (curriculum director, associate provost) to be informed about the results of vertical alignment efforts. For consistency of approach, administrators in both groups should be interviewed. There is need for the AVATAR Project to provide for formal reporting to interested administrators who are not in a line relationship to the faculty participants.