Creating a Culture of High Expectations, Student Motivation and Instructional Support in Schools and Classrooms

Schoolwide support for higher achievement is essential. Students need a nurturing environment where they feel secure about learning, where the goal is success for every student and where students are confident they will receive mentoring and encouragement to prepare for their futures. Many schools are reinventing themselves to motivate students to work harder and to take more responsibility for success.

Develop and Gain Support for a School Culture That Promotes Success for Every Student

Implementing an Extra-Help Program Where No Students Fail

Leaders and teachers at **Central R-III High School** in Park Hills, Missouri, refuse to allow students to fail. The school has maintained "Recognized With Distinction" status from the state for eight years by meeting every state standard annually. The school also received a *High Schools That Work* (*HSTW*) Gold Achievement Award in 2010 and was recognized as an Outstanding *HSTW* School in 2011.

The school's population of 600 students is 98 percent white and 2 percent other ethnicities. More than 60 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches; 20 percent of students are classified as special needs.

Despite success, Central R-III still faced challenges with student apathy and higher-than-expected failure rates. In some classes, students knew they could pass the exam without doing homework, so they avoided doing it. In other classes, students knew they would fail the course if they incurred a certain number of zeros. When they reached that number, they simply stopped doing the work, knowing that they would fail anyway.

Discipline Issues

Students' missed assignments were leading to student discipline issues. Those with three or more missing assignments were sent to the principal's office and then to Saturday school or in-school suspension.

After participating in sessions on no zeros grading policies at a *HSTW* Summer Staff Development Conference, three Central R-III teachers decided to try such a policy. They returned to school with a plan to enlist staff buy-in through a training workshop and an extra-help focus team.

Staff members participated in a book study of *The Power of ICU* by Danny Hill and Jayson Nave. The school also brought in an SREB school improvement consultant to provide more training on how to implement a no zeros policy. The science department then piloted the program.

"It was amazing how quickly the students came on board with the new policy," Principal **Brad Coleman** said. "Just a month into the program, students started telling their other teachers about it."

How the Policy Works

Students at Central R-III are required to redo any work that does not meet the Basic level (70 percent). Any incomplete or below-Basic work is listed on an assignment log kept in each classroom. A new due date is set for the assignment. If a student fails to reach the Basic level on a quiz or an assessment, he or she must complete a new assessment during the school's extra-help program known as PASS (Performance and Achievement System for Success).

In 2010-2011 the no-zeros policy had six levels through which students progressed if they did not complete an assignment:

Level 1: The first step is a conversation between the student and the teacher. When a student misses an assignment, the teacher sets a new due date and assigns the student to attend PASS.

Level 2: If the student does not complete the assignment by the new due date, the teacher contacts the student's parents or guardians and sets a new due date.

Level 3: If the student still does not complete the assignment, the teacher and a guidance counselor conduct a conference with the student to determine why the work is being left undone. An e-mail is sent to the principal. **Note: This level was removed from the policy in 2011-2012**. **"We found no underlying issues that required counseling, so we decided to eliminate this step," Coleman said**.

Level 4: The student must participate in an administrator/teacher/student conference followed by another call to the student's parents. The student is assigned to attend Saturday PASS.

Level 5: A parent/teacher/student conference is scheduled to devise an action plan for completing the work.

Level 6: This level is "crisis intervention." At this point, everyone involved meets to determine further actions, which can include suspension or alternative school placement.

Through the first year, the majority of issues ended at Level 2. Only four students reached Level 5, and only one student reached Level 6.

Faculty Action

In moving to a no-zeros policy, the entire faculty analyzed homework and other assignments. "They really had to look at what they were assigning," Coleman said.

To clarify expectations, the school defined homework as "assignments that require time outside the classroom to reinforce and/or enhance classroom instruction." These assignments include individual or group projects, research papers or projects, or other daily assignments that require time outside of class to complete. "The new policy is allowing teachers to teach to standards and is requiring all students to meet the standards," Coleman added.

Flexibility

Teachers have flexibility to decide how to use the grading policy in the classroom. Some teachers award full credit for late assignments, while others give up to 70 percent.

Another option is for teachers to alter the policy as needed. For example, math teachers found that some students would look at the exam questions and turn in a blank paper on the scheduled day, saying they would take the exam the next day in PASS. As a result, they knew what questions to expect on the exam. Math teachers updated the policy so that students receive the average of two scores if they retake the exam.

Since implementing the policy schoolwide, teachers have reported a significant drop in the number of missing assignments. The number of students receiving a grade of D has decreased by 57 percent and the number receiving a grade of F by 72 percent since the 2009-2010 school year. Furthermore, the number of students assigned to extra help for below-Basic work declined 68 percent from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011 — meaning that more students are meeting standards on their assignments and assessments.

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Ensuring Mastery Learning Through the Power of I

Student performance and the graduation rate at **Wren High School** (WHS) in rural Piedmont, South Carolina, needed improvement. Principal **Robbie Binnicker** admits he was frustrated. "We needed to make sure our students could not opt out of learning," he said.

Binnicker and a focus team of teachers and administrators set a goal for every student to "master the core standards of each course and earn a unit toward graduation." In coming up with a plan, the team addressed traditional grading practices, attended the *HSTW* summer staff development conference and kept the lines of communication open in developing a grading protocol to improve student achievement. Authors **Jayson Nave** and **Danny Hill** were invited to present concepts from their book, *The Power of ICU*, to WHS staff and faculty. Nave and Hill specialize in how to revive student responsibility and accountability in class.

By the end of 2009-2010, students' grades had improved and teachers and parents were giving positive feedback. "This was the fuel we needed to expand the work of the focus team and to make the Power of I system the vehicle for mastery learning," Binnicker said.

"The purpose of the plan was to create a system where failure is not an option — Students who do not master the objectives the first time are given additional time and tutoring to master the content and skills."

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Wren High School

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The plan for mastery learning and the Power of I grading policy was presented to the entire faculty and staff for adoption in 2010-2011. Staff and faculty completed a book study on *The Power of ICU* and participated in professional development on mastery learning and grading practices presented by **Loren Anderson** of the University of South Carolina. Anderson prepares teachers to organize instruction to help every student reach his or her full potential.

The new mastery and grading policy requires the signatures of students, teachers and parents. Each teacher determines assignments and assessments that are critical to student learning in a particular unit. Students who do not master the assessment with a score of 70 or better are required to participate in additional instruction and tutoring sessions. A student's grade remains I for Incomplete until the student retests and masters the content.

"The purpose of the plan was to create a system where failure is not an option and where teachers, students and parents work together to ensure academic success," Binnicker said. "Students who do not master the objectives the first time are given additional time and tutoring to master the content and skills."

As a result of the new approach, students' scores on vital assessments have increased from 56 percent to 87 percent. The graduation rate at WHS rose from 78 percent to 90 percent. Teachers have changed their focus from teaching the entire class to ensuring that every student learns and masters the content.

"Wren High School is continuing to improve and refine mastery learning strategies for student achievement," Binnicker said. "The results are proving that the new system is working."

Building Leadership Communities Where Failure Is Not an Option®

Alan Blankstein, award-winning author and president of the HOPE Foundation in Bloomington, Indiana, maintains that every school has the capacity to improve the instructional practices of teachers. "Even low-performing schools have examples of quality instruction that can become the basis for school improvement," he said.

Blankstein's latest book, *The Answer Is in the Room: How Effective Schools Scale Up Student Success*, provides an approach designed to make "pockets of excellence" in schools the norm. The book aims to help stakeholders recognize how to identify and scale the highly effective teaching methods already found in some classrooms.

An Approach That Works

Blankstein depicts in clear terms an approach that works across the board. The approach incorporates commitment, resources, excellence, action planning, transference and embedding of the knowledge. Examples of success include a middle grades school near Dallas, Texas, that reduced incidents of suspensions and expulsions from 2,000 to 100 in two years; three New York schools that went from D to A ratings within three years; and entire districts that made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time.

"The process of identifying the best instructional practices is technically simple but socially complex," Blankstein said. "Once we get the leadership teams on the same page, we begin to shift the conversations away from negative or nonproductive exchanges of WHO did something to WHAT was done and HOW we can learn to make the best teaching methods the norm. Eventually, enough trust is built so that truly effective conversation on the nature of good instruction can occur."

Blankstein shared one activity to help teachers develop a common understanding of excellence. Once they have developed an understanding together, they can begin to identify excellence in their own classrooms and in those of others. When done correctly, the strategy known as "instructional learning walks" becomes a meaningful activity rather than one that must be done.

The steps that teams follow in conducting learning walks include:

- **Brainstorm a list of observable indicators of quality instruction**. Think of a lesson you have taught or observed that was highly successful in terms of student participation and outcomes. How did you know it was successful? What actions did the students take to contribute to successful outcomes? What actions did the teacher take to promote success? What were some key attributes of the lesson that contributed to its success in each category (teacher behaviors and student behaviors)? List teacher behaviors and actions and student behaviors and actions that indicate when quality instruction is present.

- **Norm the indicators of quality instruction as a group**. Share your individual lists in teams and small groups. Combine and refine the lists to form one comprehensive list. Continue to combine and refine until you have a list of three to five indicators in each category (teacher behaviors and student behaviors).

- **Check the indicators of quality instruction**. Distinguish between indicators of quality instruction and lesson design/instructional strategies. For example, an indicator might be "focused student discussion" while a strategy for incorporating focused student discussion might be cooperative learning. You want to identify the "indicator of quality" such as focused discussion rather than the specific instructional strategy or program.

"Schools have focused for some time on what needs to be done and how to buy it off the shelf," Blankstein said. "We have learned that success and sustainability are all about HOW people work together. The WHAT — the answer — already exists in the school or district. Finding it is the easy part. Getting everyone to do it is tough. It is possible, and it's outlined in *The Answer Is in the Room*.

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Embedded Intervention Is the Answer for Middle Grades Students

Spring Hill Middle School (SHMS), a new school in Spring Hill, Tennessee, opened with an embedded intervention plan to prepare students for high school. The plan is comprehensive, including extra help to meet standards, preparation for ninth-grade and other transitions, and the development of independent learners.

SHMS enrolls 675 students in grades five through eight. Since all students entering SHMS the first year were from targeted schools, the big question was, "How do we start the year off with an intervention program to get these students caught up?"

Taking its cue from an embedded intervention program at Spring Hill High School, the middle grades plan provides opportunities for students to engage in a multitude of activities during one period of the day. Students can make up work and exams; redo work, essays and exams; receive peer tutoring and evaluation; participate in study groups; and work on projects and oral presentations.

Students keep learning logs, benefit from differentiated activities, prepare for exams; and participate in literacy, numeracy and science instruction across the curriculum. They complete an interdisciplinary project, participate in Socratic seminars and debates, and complete research and surveys.

The middle grades school and the high school have a "no zeros" policy. They use the Power of I (Incomplete) instead of D's, F's and zeros. Homework is not assigned to find out what students know; it is given to move students from one level of knowledge and skills to another.

In 2010-2011, the embedded intervention time was 25 minutes in the third period. In 2011-2012, the designated time is 45 minutes in the seventh period. Character education and free time are available on various days of the week. Fridays are reading and writing days for all grades.

Data from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) revealed that 65 percent of Spring Hill Middle School students scored Proficient or Advanced in all subjects in 2010-2011 — the highest percentage in Maury County. Writing scores were also the highest in the county with 97 percent of SHMS students scoring Proficient or Advanced.

Principal **Phillip Wright** is happy to share his experiences with other schools. "Consider the structure of your schedule and how to fit the intervention period into the instructional day," he advised. "Include a reward system, peer tutoring with service points, and time to retake tests. Give students access to math and computer labs and the library. Allow clubs and other activities to meet during the period and consider a quiet study hall for students not in detention or intervention."

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Learn and Implement Successful Strategies to Promote Respect, Fairness and Responsible Behavior in Students and Adults

Peer Mediation Program Credited With Easing Conflict and Bullying on Campus

Students at **North Mobile County Middle School** (NMCMS) in Axis, Alabama, are learning to resolve conflicts through conversation and peer mediation.

The school serves 550 students in grades six through eight. The student population is 58 percent white, 40 percent black and 2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native. Two-thirds of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The school has met all Adequate Yearly Progress goals under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* for the past three years.

"A big challenge is how to resolve conflicts, especially with students who are new to the school at the beginning of the year," Principal **Randy Campbell** said. "We teach students how to deal with conflict through mediation."

Anti-Bullying

NMCMS implemented a peer mediation program to deal with student bullying — a common problem in middle grades schools. "Bullying can affect the entire culture of a school," Campbell said. He cited four consequences of bullying:

- Academic achievement suffers and absenteeism often increases when a student is bullied.

- Teacher morale declines as bullying interferes with classroom management and learning.

- Adult-student relationships suffer if students believe adults have lost control of the situation.

- Parents lose confidence and trust in the school.

Peer mediation exposes bullying and allows the bully to see the victim as a real person. It teaches students positive conflict resolution skills relatively early in their educational careers.

"The middle grades are the time to build characteristics that students will need throughout their lives," Campbell said. Peer mediation creates a safe school culture in which conflict is resolved through communication rather than aggression.

School leaders and teachers at NMCMS decided in fall 2009 to launch a peer mediation program. Students applied to become peer mediators and were chosen to be representative of the school's demographics. "We looked for natural leaders with qualities such as warmth, acceptance of others and a high energy level," Campbell said.

Training for Mediators

Peer mediators participated in an intensive two-day workshop to learn the mediation process and to practice role playing in various scenarios. The students were assigned so that four mediators would be available during each class period through the school day.

The peer mediation process for NMCMS students is totally voluntary. Students who believe they have been victimized ask for a mediation session. Other involved parties are invited to attend — and have the option to decline.

Every effort is made to schedule mediation sessions during students' elective classes. Students sign a contract agreeing to the ground rules of mediation. Mediators facilitate a conversation with the intent to reach an understanding among the students. If agreement is reached, the students sign a contract saying they will do what they have agreed to do. A student who breaks a contract repeats the mediation process or is referred to a school administrator.

Adults Not Allowed

No adults are allowed in the mediation room, but the school guidance counselor is nearby if a session threatens to get out of hand.

"Most of our students are involved in the mediation process in some way during the year," Campbell said. The school completed more than 140 mediation sessions involving more than 375 students in 2010-2011. "Students don't see the program as a way to get out of class," Campbell continued. "They take the program seriously."

Discipline referrals and incidents of fighting have declined drastically. **The school had more than 1,600 discipline referrals in 2009-2010**. **The following year, with 100 additional students in the building, the total was 600. The school resource officer reported his involvement in serious discipline issues has dropped 40 percent since the peer mediation program began**.

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Schools and Parents Can Take Action to Prevent Cyber-Bullying and Technology Bullying of Students

Digital media in the form of cell phones, electronic messaging and the Internet have become the "wild west" of bullying activities. All of these devices present challenges for this generation of digitally connected teenagers. Too often, the devices can lead to cyber-bullying — the use of the Internet and related technologies to embarrass, humiliate or threaten someone.

Laura Buddenberg, training manager, and **Steph Jensen**, director of community contracts, at **Boys Town** in Boys Town, Nebraska, want educators and parents to know the dangers of cyber-bullying. "Electronics such as iPods, cell phones, computers, Facebook, texting, Twitter, Skype, YouTube and online dating forums provide a multitude of opportunities for someone to bully a student," Buddenberg said. Anything that interferes with learning in or out of school is a threat to a student's success.

Parents should suspect cyber-bullying if students spend unusually long hours on the computer, close the computer screen when a parent enters the room or become secretive about Internet activity. Other warning signals are when a student gets behind in school work, loses his or her appetite, and/or suffers from stomachache and fear.

School policies about cyber-bullying may be inconsistent. "School districts can conduct anonymous surveys on technology and electronic bullying to determine the extent of the problem and then write policies about personal electronics, Buddenberg said. "Such policies should have clear expectations and include prohibitions against profanity, porn, rumors and drug-related activities."

- A good website for educators and parents is www.getnetwise.org.

- Resources include the Boys Town national hotline at 1-800-282-6657.

- Workshops on classroom management dealing with bullying and parent awareness are available from Boys Town at 1-800-545-5771 or online at www.boystown.org/educators.

- Many books on how to identify and prevent bullying are available from Boys Town at 1-800-282-6657 or online at www.boystownpress.org.

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Identify School Characteristics That Motivate Students to Achieve at Higher Levels

The Urgency of a Failing School: Tackling Issues and Turning a School Around

Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School in Brooklyn, New York, felt the "urgency of a failing school" and has taken numerous actions in recent years to improve scholarship, attendance and graduation rates. With the leadership of Principal **Jocelyn Badette**, the result has been transformation from a "D" school to a "B"school.

The school enrolls some 800 students, including 71 percent black students, 27 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 percent white. Eighty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Students take academic courses in the ninth grade and choose a major for the remainder of high school.

"We had two essential ingredients — good students and teachers who would not give up," Assistant Principal **Joseph Palmisano** said. "We instituted a series of short-term and long-term strategies to redesign the school in ways that motivated students to succeed."

No Failures

One action taken was to implement the Power of I (Incomplete) grading policy. Students are not allowed to fail. Teachers invoke the Power of I if students do not complete their assignments or turn in work below C-level. Students are removed from elective classes or stay after school to bring work up to standard.

Community Support

Another aspect of reform was to seek assistance from community-based organizations such as Partnership with Children, a nonprofit that provides emotional and social support to at-risk children. Maxwell operates a school-based program known as Open Heart-Open Mind and participates in professional development through the Center for Capacity Building.

Four Goals

The staff at Maxwell selected four areas of improvement for special emphasis: attendance, discipline, graduation rates and scholarship.

- **Attendance improved from 69 percent in 2006-2007 to 85 percent in 2010-2011**. The methods included case conferencing in each small learning community (SLC), an attendance contest among the SLCs, SLC teams for student outreach, recognition ceremonies for improved attendance, home visits by the community liaison, phone messages to students' homes, attendance meetings, targeting attendance in periods one and eight, and tracking student and teacher attendance.

- **Discipline referrals declined from 308 in 2006-2007 to 102 in 2010-2011**. The school used strategies such as conflict resolution training, mediation, in-house suspensions, after-school detentions and hallway sweeps to prevent classroom tardies. In implementing a new dress code, the school required students to wear uniforms comprising khaki pants and white shirts. Security officers at the school are linked to the local police department.

- **The graduation rate increased from 43 percent in 2006-2007 to 62 percent in 2010-2011**. The school is working to increase the rate even more. The strategies have included a credit recovery program, evening school, Saturday school, intensive extra help, individualized attention for students, an Adopt a Senior initiative giving students support and encouragement, mock Regents exams, independent studies, case conferencing in SLCs to reach every student, and specialized advisement to help students graduate on time.

- **Scholarship is improving year by year**. New York State Regents Exam data shows that the passing percentage of Maxwell students rose from 49 percent in June 2005 to 75 percent in June 2011 in English/language arts and from 38 percent in 2005 to 80 percent in 2011 in physics. The passing rate in chemistry climbed from 46 percent in 2005 to 76 percent in 2010. Strategies used by the school to improve scholarship consisted of professional development, a preliminary grade review, grade conferencing between teachers and students, intensive tutoring, team building, tracking students with five or more credits, and the Power of I. To improve scores on the state Regents exams, the school offered advisory sessions with mock exams, individualized study strategies, matching students with teachers, case conferences in SLCs, peer tutoring, Regents-style questioning in all classes (academic and career/technical), departmental tutoring before and after school, and a specialized Regents prep period daily.

"We still have to deal with issues in attendance, lower funding and getting everyone on board, but the school team and the students believe in what they are doing," Palmisano said. "We have made great strides in five years by instituting strategies that will lead to increased student success, but we must continue to improve."

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Technology and Project-Based Learning Engage Students at a Career/Technical High School Making Strides to Improve

Teachers at **Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School** in Brooklyn, New York, have increased the use of technology to engage students in learning. In 2010-2011 the school began working with consultants from **Breakthrough Education Strategies** (BES) of West Hartford, Connecticut, a company with 15 years experience helping urban high schools and middle grades schools use the power of technology to engage low-performing students.

BES trained all teachers in grade nine to use SoftChalk module development software with BES electronic templates to write learning modules in their subject areas. The templates ensure that the modules adhere to state standards and the *HSTW* Key Practices for school improvement. In using this technique, teachers are preparing students for success on the New York State Regents Exams and are instilling 21st- century knowledge and skills. In other words, they are designing the work that students need to do to reach their academic goals.

Classroom Dynamics

"This instructional method brings a huge change in classroom dynamics," said **Michael Suntag** of BES. "It allows teachers to help students take control of their own learning." The instructional emphasis is on performing authentic tasks in a meaningful curriculum. Students work with others to solve real-world problems and to produce quality projects. They use dialogue, discussion and debate.

Since all students in the core subjects at Maxwell have laptop computers, they use the Internet to do research connected with the learning modules. Then they bring the information back to engage in discussions with teachers and other students.

"Teachers' use of the modules has improved dramatically over time," said **John Tarnuzzer** of BES. "Teachers have become experts in writing the lessons and have even taken it to the next level." The modules are easily shared electronically among teachers as best practices.

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Five Habits of a Successful Turnaround Principal

Allan Bonilla considers himself a "turnaround principal." When he arrived at **Palm Springs Middle School** (PSMS) in the Miami, Florida, area in 1989, the school was "a disaster." The buildings and grounds were unkempt; graffiti covered the walls, and major gang problems kept many students from reaching their potential.

"Failure was everywhere," Bonilla continued. "So many students were overage that we had a student parking lot — at a middle grades school."

To turn the school around, Bonilla used five leadership habit strategies that he was convinced would work — and work quickly.

Habit 1: Structured Visibility. Bonilla stood in front of the school every morning to let parents see him and to show students that the principal cared about them. "I could observe the students, see who their friends were and know what they were doing," he said. He asked one of the student gang leaders, "How would you like to go see a play about a young boy who dreams of being a matador?" No one had ever asked the student a question like that; it caught his attention and caused him to respect the principal.

Listening is a key skill for a principal. "It is essential in building relationships, understanding the school culture and being able to identify the root causes of problems and propose viable solutions."

Allan Bonilla
Palm Springs Middle School

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Habit 2: Smart Delegation. A principal cannot do everything in a school. He or she must identify the strengths of the faculty and staff and let them use their assets to bring change. For example, an assistant principal at PSMS had a talent for special education, so Bonilla put her in charge of it. "Not everything can be delegated," Bonilla said. "I took responsibility for drawing up the master schedule when I discovered that it was favoring a clique of teachers rather than serving the students."

Habit 3: Celebration. PSMS had one of the lowest attendance rates in the district when Bonilla became principal. He addressed the problem by using helium balloons and parties to recognize students in homerooms that excelled in attendance. The recognition included perfect attendance announcements and rewards in the form of field trips. "Everyone likes to hear his or her name called," Bonilla said. "We made it a habit to celebrate accomplishments and events worthy of praise." Bonilla pays attention to what author Neila Conners says about nurturing teachers and what author and lecturer Tal Ben-Shahar says about cultivating happiness. "An administrator's job is to help people be happy," Bonilla said.

Habit 4: Ask — Don't Tell. One thing Bonilla has learned over the years is to "ask a lot more questions and make a lot fewer statements." Listening is a key skill for a principal. "It is essential in building relationships, understanding the school culture and being able to identify the root causes of problems and propose viable solutions," Bonilla said.

Habit 5: Walk the Talk; Set the Tone. Leaders need to model the behavior they expect of others. To bring out the best in teachers, principals should have a mastery of pedagogy and the profession. "Technical competence cannot be faked," Bonilla said. While others can relax or take a break, the principal must use every interaction to set the right tone. "Principals cannot afford to be moody or depressed," Bonilla said. "Their demeanor affects the entire school."

Using these five habits, Bonilla was able to lead PSMS to success. The attendance rate rose to the best in the district; the suspension rate fell to 3.4 percent, and Bonilla was named Dade County Principal of the Year.

From Nightmare to Dream: How PBIS Changed One School's Climate

Alcorn Middle School (AMS) in Columbia, South Carolina, initiated a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program four years ago that included a broad range of systemic and individualized strategies aimed at raising achievement and reducing behavior problems. "PBIS is always changing to meet the needs of the school," said Principal **Baron Davis**. "It may take three to five years to implement a behavior program successfully."

The student population at AMS is 98 percent black. Ninety-five percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Before PBIS was implemented, the school had more than 5,000 discipline referrals per year. Now, such referrals total about 1,200 annually.

AMS began by organizing a school team to develop student incentives and to devise a mentoring system for "Red Zone" students — those with six or more referrals from the previous school year. The following year, all faculty and staff received professional development in the areas of relationships, school culture and behavior. Subsequently, the school revamped the mentoring program, enlisted more teacher buy-in, provided incentives for teachers and students, and utilized discipline data in making decisions. Teachers modeled the type of behavior expected of students.

By 2010-2011 the school had named a full-time PBIS coordinator, celebrated total teacher buy-in and achieved consistency in implementing the program with students, teachers and staff. Data on referrals are announced monthly. The PBIS team consists of the PBIS coordinator, an assistant principal, a counselor and teachers representing various specialties.

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Create a School Culture That Supports, Mentors and Encourages All Students

Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life

Across America, in cities and rural areas alike, far too many black males are being left behind in school and in life.

Principal **Baruti Kafele** of **Newark Tech High School** in Newark, New Jersey, has devoted his career as an educator to helping young black men succeed. "Before we can effectively address classroom management or the gaps in reading and math achievement, we must address the school climate and culture," he said. "It means that administrators and teachers need to start within themselves."

He recommends that educators begin each day by asking some hard questions about black male students:

- Do I believe in them?

- Do I know them?

- Do I care about them?

- Do I realize who they are?

- Do I teach them how to soar?

The "other gaps" that Kafele believes must be closed before the assessment differences can be addressed are:

- **Attitude gap** — "If we don't believe in these students, who will?" Kafele asks.

- **Relationship gap** — Many black males wear a protective mask that says they do not care, but if a teacher can remove the mask and get to know the student, he or she can teach reading and math.

"If we as educators bring the right beliefs and passion to our work, we can get our black male students not only to succeed but to soar."

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- **Compassion gap** — An educator has to care about the student or the mask will not come off.

- **Relevance gap** — Students' interests need to be met. "Boys need to move around," Kafele said. "Yet we ask them to sit quietly for up to 90 minutes straight, give them three minutes to change classes and then ask them to sit for another 90 minutes." Young men need to actively engage in learning. Educators need to let students "star" in the classroom.

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Developing an Empowerment Program for Young Men

Kafele instituted Power Monday at Newark Tech after he became principal in 2005-2006. Male students started the week by wearing a shirt and tie, slacks, a belt and appropriate shoes. They had classroom meetings, small-group sessions and one-on-one mentoring sessions with successful black adult males. They also had opportunities to meet and spend time with black male college students, successful black male professionals in their work environments and black male political leaders. The activities also included male retreats, father-son programs and male study groups.

Kafele's philosophy and leadership have resulted in cultural changes and increased achievement at Newark Tech. The New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) is administered to all juniors at public and charter high schools in the state. Juniors who fail to reach proficiency are given the opportunity to retake the HSPA as seniors, since the assessment is a graduation requirement.

Newark Tech enrolls 70 percent black students and 30 percent Latino students. Eighty-five percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches. The first-time scores of Newark Tech students on the HSPA grew from 68 percent Proficiency in math in 2005-2006 to 83 percent in 2009-2010. The Proficiency scores in language arts rose from 73 percent in 2005-2006 to 93 percent in 2009-2010.

Beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education began to combine the scores of seniors that retook the HSPA (after failing the first time as juniors) with the junior passing scores. Those percentages at Newark Tech increased from 88 percent to 98 percent in math and from 98 percent to 99 percent in language arts between 2008-2009 and 2010-2011.

Kafele was recognized as a Milken National Educator in 2009. He is author of the book *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School & in Life*.

"If we as educators bring the right beliefs and passion to our work, we can get our black male students not only to succeed but to soar," Kafele said.

School Uses Student-Centered Tactics to Improve Achievement and Preparation for the Future

Lakeside High School (LHS) in Garland County, Arkansas, enrolls 1,200 students in grades eight through 12. The school joined the *HSTW* network in 2007 and hosted Technical Assistance Visits in 2007 and 2011. LHS was one of 13 schools recognized in 2011 as an Outstanding *HSTW* School.

"There is great excitement in our school district about these changes — We are in a mode of self-reflection and improvement. We feel we still have much to do to better serve our students."

Bruce Orr
Lakeside High School

Bruce Orr
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Achievement has risen and dropout rates have declined during the past four years. Ninety percent of students were Proficient on state end-of-course exams in 2011. Almost 85 percent were Proficient on the 11th- grade literacy exam. Each year since 2007, at least 20 percent more students have taken the ACT with composite scores rising to 1.7 points above the state average. In 2011 the school had 100 percent participation of 12th-graders in taking the ACT while still remaining above the state average.

In October 2011 leaders and teachers received the good news that Garland County was one of five Arkansas school districts that earned a top grade of A from the Murphy Commission (Policy Foundation project) in the first state report required under a 2003 Arkansas accountability law. Garland and four other districts achieved Level 5 (a school of excellence) from the state in its first number-grade report established in 2003. The report was compiled for the Arkansas Department of Education by the National Office for Research, Measurement and Evaluation Systems, at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville.

"Paying close attention to Technical Assistance Visit reports and working with an SREB school improvement consultant have made positive impacts on our school," Principal **Bruce Orr** said. Orr points to several tactics that have made a difference for students at LHS.

Advisory Program — Through the Career Action Planning (CAP) model, students and parents become aware of the importance of planning for postsecondary success and of the opportunities available to students beyond high school. LHS students and teachers meet in CAP groups several times during the school year to talk about selecting the right courses and planning for the future. More than 95 percent of students attend a scheduling conference with their parents each spring. One student said, "CAP teachers move us to take harder classes and to pack our schedules."

Increased Rigor — The 2007 Technical Assistance Visit report identified a need for increased rigor as a priority for LHS. As a result, the school made a commitment to eliminate low-level courses, increase the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses from six to 14, add more honors courses and raise graduation standards. The district supported the school in doing away with driver education, sociology and study halls and in increasing the number of college-preparatory courses. "We were the first school in Arkansas to adopt Smart Core, the state's most rigorous curriculum, as minimum graduation requirements," Orr said.

Extra Help — An after-school tutoring program known as RAM Time has been available since 2007. The district has shown its commitment by funding all aspects of the program, including staffing, facilities and transportation. RAM Time is staffed by a cadre of certified teachers. Students are able to complete missed assignments and receive extra help when struggling. The program also helps students with excessive absences to make up missed days. Students who fail the first semester of geometry, Algebra II and/or English 9, 10 or 11 are placed in catch-up classes for the second semester. The instruction in these classes is student-centered and project-oriented. Students often are assigned to different teachers with different teaching styles than those they had first semester.

Summer Bridge Program — Rising freshmen identified as likely to fail in high school receive interventions to help them succeed. A summer bridge program, which began in 2011, was scheduled for nine days in a two-week period. Students spent time in English/ language arts, math, science and social studies. Instruction was challenging but far from traditional. For example, students in a science class visited a local university where they studied the solar system in a planetarium. Another science lesson took students to the Mid-America Science Museum in Hot Springs where they interacted with many exhibits on matter and its different properties. In a history class, students toured the Gangster Museum of America in Hot Springs and wrote papers on life in the Prohibition era. Three LHS administrators and a key literacy teacher who taught in the summer program viewed the program as an opportunity to build positive relationships with students.

Career Education — More students from LHS than from any other Garland County school participate in career education classes at National Park Community College (NPCC) technology center. LHS provides transportation for students to attend classes at NPCC daily in the morning or afternoon. More than 200 LHS juniors and seniors participate in the program. Career/technical offerings have expanded on the LHS campus, which has added a new food science lab and classrooms and a two-year program in Orientation to Teaching, Leadership and Service Learning, and Childcare/Guidance.

NOTE: More information on the partnership of Lakeside High School and National Park Community College will be included in an article titled "Good Things Happen for Students When Technology Centers and High Schools Work Together" in Online Newsletter 4 from the 2011 *HSTW* Staff Development Conference.

"There is great excitement in our school district about these changes," Orr said. "We are in a mode of self-reflection and improvement. We feel we still have much to do to better serve our students."

Middle Grades School Receives State and National Recognition for Helping Students Succeed

For more than 20 years, Principal **Barry Knight** of **Palmetto Middle School** in Williamston, South Carolina, has worked to create an environment that maximizes the potential of every student. He has been rewarded with a number of honors for himself and the school, from Principal of the Year to Palmetto being named a national "school to watch" and a South Carolina State Department of Education Red Carpet School.

Palmetto Middle School is in a rural area where a high poverty rate affects most of the 760 students enrolled in grades six through eight.

From beginning to end, the school day at Palmetto Middle focuses on improving students' prospects for a successful life. When students arrive, they sit down in the hallways to study for tests, read books and catch up on homework assignments. "The hallways have become an extension of the classroom rather than a place to roam and socialize with other students," Knight said.

Getting Organized

Each student receives a school-issued three-ring binder to organize courses by divider label, an agenda notebook to track schedules and assignments, and a handbook to use as an organizational guide for the entire school year. The agenda notebook is useful, since each class period is based on a rotating schedule through the year.

Teachers at Palmetto Middle work in teams by subject area and meet weekly with other team members to plan and develop course work and assignments. The school enforces a schoolwide grading policy and standardizes content and assessments so that all teachers in the same grade level distribute the same subject-based exams. Common assessments and professional learning communities promote professional development and communication within the teacher teams.

Technology and learning go hand-in-hand at Palmetto Middle, where students have access to more than 30 iPods, use netbooks in the classroom and participate in Skype sessions.

Only one grade at a time is allowed in the hallways. As students walk to the next class, they listen to light music rather than a loud bell.

Lunchtime Learning

During lunchtime, students choose to go outside for recess, visit the library for study hall, stay in the cafeteria or play basketball in the gym. Students who fall behind in their studies are enrolled in a lunchtime learning program where they receive tutoring.

Every nine weeks, Palmetto Middle rewards students who have posted an 80 percent or better grade point average, earned community service credit, had fewer than two unexcused absences and kept an exemplary disciplinary record.

The incentives include free admission to school and sporting events. On the other end of the spectrum, students who have scored F, D, Incomplete and zero participate in extra remediation.

"All students receive individual attention on a daily basis," Knight said. "They are individually hand-picked and scheduled by the faculty and staff based on data and demographics."

The efforts to implement a learning environment that ensures success for every student is paying off at Palmetto Middle School. The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress for the past two years and continues to be recognized for outstanding achievement by national and state organizations.

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Helping Students and Teachers Reclaim a Struggling Urban High School

When Principal **Susan Kessler** arrived in 2008 at **Hunters Lane High School** (HLHS) in Nashville, Tennessee, the school was struggling. The school was in "Corrective Action" after failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress for the past four years. Discipline incidents were on the rise and graduation and attendance rates were declining.

HLHS serves nearly 1,800 students in grades nine through 12. The student population is 62 percent black, 23 percent white, 14 percent Hispanic and 1 percent other ethnicities. Two-thirds of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

In response to teachers' requests, the first change at HLHS was to increase accountability. Assistant principals and teachers spend time on hall duty to ensure that students do not leave class too often. The school uses a standard hall pass form and teachers have a certain number of passes they can issue. "Before, students could come and go from class as they pleased," Assistant Principal **Andrew Davis** said.

Better Morale

School leaders have taken action to improve student and teacher morale. One of the first things was to reinstate pep rallies at football games. Students had to learn how to behave and enjoy pep rallies again. Students sit in a special section of the stadium during games and are encouraged to stand and cheer for their team, unlike in the past.

To improve teacher morale, Kessler launched a "How are we doing?" process that allows teachers to give feedback on new strategies or school activities. She also hands out weekly awards to teachers for exceptional service.

Teachers and students have 24-hour access to the principal through a dedicated cell phone used just for texting. The number is given to faculty and students at the beginning of the school year and is posted outside the principal's office through the year for her to receive comments and suggestions.

"The numbers tell us that the emphasis at our school has returned to what is happening in the classroom — Students want to be here and they want to be in class."

April Snodgrass
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Second-Year Changes

In the second year of change, HLHS focused on giving students more freedom. "It's the ultimate paradox," Academy Coach **April Snodgrass** said. "To gain control of your school, you have to give more control to your students."

The HLHS school building consists of two main hallways separated by a courtyard, which had not been used since the school was built. School leaders decided to spruce up the space and open it for students to enjoy or to use as a shortcut from one hall to another. An unforeseen benefit has been a reduction in behavior incidents. "A lot of incidents in the hallway are a result of congestion," Snodgrass said. "One student bumps into another and the situation escalates. Simply opening the courtyard has reduced congestion and incidents."

The biggest change in the second year was to institute a single lunch period, called "One Lunch." Instead of four lunch periods as in the past, the schedule calls for one period during which students can eat in the halls and the classrooms as well as in the cafeteria. They may also participate in a variety of activities during One Lunch:

- Students can complete make-up work or receive tutoring.

- Computer labs and the library are open.

- All clubs hold meetings during the lunch period.

- The gym is open for students to play basketball, indoor football or soccer.

- The school purchased a karaoke machine, a billiards table and some video game systems for students to use.

Planning for One Lunch

One Lunch took careful planning and cooperation by everyone in the building. Teachers visited another school that had used the method successfully and more than 40 teachers attended a voluntary planning meeting in the summer.

"One Lunch has made a huge impact on our school culture," Snodgrass said. "It has increased positive interactions between teachers and students. Student participation in clubs skyrocketed 45 percent in the first year. Student achievement has benefitted, too, since students have time to seek tutoring or to make up missed assignments."

Hunters Lane High School leaders are seeing results from efforts to reclaim the school.

- The graduation rate increased 5 percent in one year and the Class of 2010 met the state graduation target.

- Overall discipline incidents declined 61 percent from 2007-2008 to 2009-2010; cutting class and tardies decreased 74 percent, and the number of students with nine or more behavior incidents dropped 45 percent.

- Attendance rates are now in line with state requirements.

- Teacher attrition dropped from 20 percent in 2008 to less than 9 percent in 2010.

"The numbers tell us that the emphasis at our school has returned to what is happening in the classroom," Snodgrass said. "Students want to be here and they want to be in class."

Using Advisory to Transform the Culture of a Middle Grades School

Heyward Gibbes Middle School (HGMS) in Columbia, South Carolina, enrolls 351 urban students. The student population is 99 percent black. Ninety-two percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

A few years ago, the failure rates had reached a new high, attendance was low and it was obvious that poverty was taking its toll on achievement. A turnaround principal was assigned to make changes at this low-performing school.

When faculty members began to study the effects of poverty on academic success, they set a goal to establish positive relationships with students. Surprisingly, there were some students in this small school that no teachers knew anything about.

Advisory Program

"We realized that we could not raise student achievement until we improved the school culture," Principal **Kwamine Simpson** said. The priority was to develop an advisory program that would involve as many teachers and staff members as possible in helping students improve behavior, social skills and academic performance.

The HGMS advisory team attended a two-day workshop presented by SREB in Atlanta in October 2009 and another in January 2010. While participating in the workshops, the team developed the foundation for an advisory program that they took back to the school.

The entire staff spent time during summer 2009 to receive training and to develop activities for the advisory program. They made a vow to keep advisory periods lively by engaging students in meaningful activities.

Variety of Adults

To keep the number of students in each advisory group small, the team called on as many adults as they could find in the building and trained them to use the advisory tools, resources and materials. As a result, the advisory leaders include the principal, a custodian and security monitors, not just certified staff. The team also consulted with district personnel and worked with the high school to align the middle grades advisory program with expectations at the secondary level.

In the first year, the advisory period consisted of 40 minutes every other week. The time was allotted by taking five minutes from each period. The advisory groups consisted of eight students, each from the same gender and grade level.

The groups were slightly larger in the second year — from 10 to 12 students each — and met every week during the last 40 minutes of school.

Developing the Lessons

"We found that a lot of schools would start advisory programs and then drop them because it is hard to provide different lessons for three years," Counselor **Bernadette Brown** said. The administrators at HGMS develop lessons that they provide to the group leaders each Friday so that they can study them over the weekend. The leaders are expected to use their own personalities and their knowledge of students in their groups to develop activities for the lessons.

Advisory sessions give HGMS an opportunity to have one-on-one talks with each student about academic achievement. "The district has set quarterly goals for each student based on state testing," Simpson said. "Advisors talk with students about their personal goals and what they need to do to improve their scores."

The result has been that more than 60 percent of HGMS students met their Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) targeted growth in mathematics in 2010-2011 — a dramatic increase from only 30 percent in the past. The advisory sessions ensure that students know their goals in each subject area and receive support to meet the goals.

Problems at Home

The advisory sessions allow concerned leaders to talk with students about problems that may be hindering them from achieving success at school. The conversations may focus on behavior or family situations, as in the case of a girl who was responsible for several younger siblings. Group leaders conduct résumé activities that include eye-openers such as "If my academic record was on my résumé…" or "If my discipline record was on my résumé…" During advisory time, students set personal and career goals and connect with caring adults who guide them to success in high school and postsecondary pursuits.

To address attendance issues at HGMS, the full-time social worker and the character education liaison developed materials that are used in the advisory. Other groups of teachers have worked together to develop materials on other topics that they identified as important to students. Each year HGMS conducts a refresher workshop on conducting an advisory for returning staff and trains any new staff members on the importance of the advisory period.

"Don't be afraid to try new things," Simpson said. "We are returning to a morning advisory time in 2011-2012 and are stepping up professional development in advisory activities. We will also introduce the book *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*."

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Teaching Boys Who Struggle to Learn: From Resignation to Resilience

"The dilemma of underachievement is to identify boys who struggle with learning and to take steps to reduce the number of underachievers," said **Kathleen Cleveland** of Big Canoe, Georgia, president and CEO of TeacherOnlineEducation.com, a provider of online courses for teachers.

Understanding four cognitive profile groupings will help educators begin to understand their struggling male students better. Group 1 (12 percent of at-risk students) looks for mastery and what works; Group 2 (1 percent of at-risk students) is logical, seeks credibility in information and is conceptual; Group 3 (63 percent of at-risk students) looks for personal meaning and must connect with people; and Group 4 (24 percent of at-risk students) looks for possibilities, believes that relevance to the real world makes a difference and needs to make connections such as, "How can I use this?"

Two groups are at the greatest risk for underachievement. "Groups 3 and 4 represent 87 percent of the at-risk student population," Cleveland said. "They generate the most concern as we look at their profiles and as their needs and abilities as learners provide us with insights about how to help them be more successful."

Group 3: Students in Group 3 thrive as learners when they are personally connected to the content; when they are able to process learning interactively with others; and when the environment is safe, welcoming and harmonious. They are most productive during group investigations, cooperative learning, collaborative activities, open discussions, peer and reciprocal tutoring, and class meetings.

The most essential learning needs of students in Group 3 are a trusting relationship with the teacher; a safe, harmonious learning environment; interactivity with others; and personal connections with the content. This group's biggest challenges are uninteresting, impersonal information and procedures; conflict or stress in the learning environment; and working independently.

Group 4: Students in this group make the most headway when they are free of rote and routine learning, drill, memorization and step-by-step procedures; when they can explore possibilities rather than recall those of others; and when given a choice. They are most productive during open-ended discussions, problem-based learning, constructed-response learning activities and performance assessments.

Group 4's most essential learning needs are to find meaning and relevance in what they are asked to learn and to generate possibilities and solve real-world problems. They dislike content without meaning.

Ironically, "the great gifts of these two groups of struggling and at-risk learners are essential 21st-century skills demanded by business and industry."

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Special Gifts

Teachers whose styles differ from the profiles of their struggling students may fail to see the potential in these students. Too many bright but underachieving young people drop out of school not knowing that they have the potential to learn. Yet learners in Groups 3 and 4 possess many gifts, such as keen observational powers, working effectively in groups, collaborating, sharing knowledge and experience, creative problem solving, seeing multiple perspectives, originality, and many other related traits. However, these strengths are seldom valued as tools for academic success. Ironically, "the great gifts of these two groups of struggling and at-risk learners are essential 21st-century skills demanded by business and industry," Cleveland said. "Schools need to develop these gifts in order to prepare these students for postsecondary education and careers."

Cultural expectations for males make it especially difficult for boys in Groups 3 and 4 to be successful in school. The so-called "boy code" says males should not cry, shrink from danger, ask for help, reach for comfort and reassurance, sing or cry for joy, hug their friends, or use words to show tenderness and love. Cleveland points out that the "code" sets up many boys — especially those in Groups 3 and 4 — to struggle socially and emotionally. As a result, inappropriate expressions of anger along with misperceptions about interpersonal communication can lead to overreactions and further isolation. Since learning is a highly social experience, students' academic success is affected.

Six pathways to reengagement are designed to transform students from resigned to resilient:

Support — Build a trusting relationship with students and create a nonthreatening learning environment. Establish positive classroom policies and make the classroom a safe place to learn, try, fail and try again.

Guide — Feedback is a powerful tool to encourage achievement, but it must be informational rather than judgmental. Teachers can use affirming statements to acknowledge effort and to help students see what they need to do next in a way that they "hear" without shutting down or becoming defensive.

Reinforce — Encourage and create communication and collaboration with cooperative learning.

Adjust — Rearrange the classroom so as to reduce distractions and to help students learn to self-regulate.

Ignite — Use principles of active learning to allow struggling students to practice their gifts, which in turn will enhance learning and hone higher-level thinking skills. Engage students in activities that allow them to see concepts and to communicate with each other with active engagement, compelling situations, direct experiences, enjoyable settings, frequent feedback, informal learning, patterns and connections, and time for reflection.

Empower — Assign literacy-building activities such as graphic novels, enactments and conversation cards to help underachieving literacy learners find success even while they continue to build their skills. Enactment can take the form of a radio talk show, an interview, a press conference, a hot seat or a flashback. Conversation cards are images that spur students to write or talk about the image.

Cleveland provides some "things to remember:"

- Not all male students struggle.
- Not all male students who struggle do so in the same way.
- Effective responses will look different for each male student, each teacher and each situation.
- Trusting relationships and a nonthreatening learning environment are the foundations for everything else.
- Little things can make a big difference.
- Do something every day.