



Advancing Academic and Technical Achievement, Graduation Rates and High School and Postsecondary Success

SREB

Schools working hard to raise academic and technical achievement, graduation rates, and high school and postsecondary success are finding that SREB school improvement initiatives provide the foundation for an effective school plan. Middle grades, high schools and technology centers are following the Key Practices of *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)*, *High Schools That Work (HSTW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* to ensure all students meet high standards.

Pacesetter Middle Grades Schools Implement the *MMGW* Design to Improve Students' Readiness to Become Independent and Successful Learners

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Using the *MMGW* School Improvement Design to Change School Culture From Good to Great

Mt. Pleasant Junior High School in rural Mt. Pleasant, Texas, has taken decisive action over the past few years to ensure all students succeed in meeting high standards. “We have surpassed all expectations in developing and maintaining a laser-like focus on student success,” said Principal **Dustin Cook**.

The school enrolls 780 students. The ethnic distribution is 65 percent Hispanic, 22 percent white and 13 percent black. A large 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Research by the principal and the focus team included attending an SREB leadership conference in spring 2008 where different “enrichment” or “alternative scaffolding” schedules were presented to meet various school and student needs. The research also included consulting with other *MMGW* principals in Texas.

Harder and Smarter

School leaders at Mt. Pleasant were determined to show students how to “work harder to get smarter.”

As a result, Cook and his staff set out to change their thinking and language from an ability-based to an effort-based learning model. “A number of activities convinced us that it was time to zero in on high expectations for students and staff,” Cook said. The activities included *MMGW* professional development at the school, including a site development workshop, training on standards-based grading and high expectations, and a Power of ICU book study and presentation.

“The seven staff members who piloted the redo initiative were highly successful,” Cook said. “Others began jumping on the bandwagon and subsequently our school decided to expect high-quality work from all students and to involve all students in taking challenging classes.”

The transformation at Mt. Pleasant from ability-based to effort-based classrooms meant all students are expected to meet high standards. Teachers emphasize helping students become independent learners who can address problems and find solutions, and indicate the quality and amount of work necessary to earn an A or B.

Communicating the New Policies

“We communicated our redo policies in writing and in student and parent information sessions such as Back to School Night,” Cook said.

- Every student completes every assignment.
- The expectation is for 80 percent mastery on every assignment and assessment.
- The schedule includes school day interventions to allow time for students to learn and redo content they have missed.

- The school takes a positive, sincere approach (rather than a disciplinary approach) to helping students.
- Students receive the highest grade attained on assignments and assessments.

As part of reforming the school, the principal and members of the school focus team developed a new master schedule with built-in opportunities for extra help throughout the day. Lunch Bunch is an allotted period during the day when students are required to redo their work to an 80 percent standard. For reteaching and intervention, the schedule typically includes 15 periods a day when teachers are available to work with struggling students in very small groups. The groups are determined by current school year assessment data.

After-school Encore is another opportunity for students to finish incomplete work or redo work. Every six weeks, students who need to catch up with schoolwork participate in an ICU day with teachers in the cafeteria or library.

The new schedule also features a daily advisory period during which students complete a short activity about social skills or character development. During the second semester of 2012-2013, the advisory class was expected to shift its focus to college- and career-awareness activities.

The new approach is working. **“We have reduced failure rates by 30 percent, increased benchmark and state achievement scores by an average of 20 percent and are seeing more students than ever before making the A/B honor roll and feeling good about what they are accomplishing in school,”** Cook said.

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Righting the Ship: Turning Around a Struggling Urban Middle Grades School

J. S. Clark Middle School (CMS) in Shreveport, Louisiana, made the journey from a struggling school to one with exemplary practices in three years by paying close attention to students and their needs. Beginning in 2009, the school used the *MMGW* initiative and best practices from other schools to guide actions for improvement.

CMS enrolls some 500 students in grades six through eight in one of the poorest areas of the city. The enrollment of black students is 99.2 percent. Significantly, 96 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

When **Gregory O’Quinn** was appointed assistant principal in 2008, the school was on a state-mandated corrective action plan to address a high suspension rate. It was also a level five school based on *No Child Left Behind* criteria.

Improved Performance

In three years, the school reduced suspensions from 53 percent to 13 percent and became a “one-star school” in coming off the state’s academically unacceptable list. School performance on the Louisiana Exam of Academic Progress (LEAP) grew from 47.8 to 65.5. The school became a demonstration site for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) on how to identify, adapt and sustain effective schoolwide disciplinary practices.

“We attribute the improvement to multiple initiatives, including an actual initiative to reduce the number of initiatives teachers were being asked to embrace,” O’Quinn said. (In 2011 O’Quinn became assistant principal of Booker T. Washington New Technology High School in Shreveport.)

Working with central office staff, school leaders at CMS helped narrow the focus for teachers and staff; students became the center of events and decisions at the school. To make it easier for teachers to meet and work together, school leaders developed a schedule that allowed for and required professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers were expected to focus on data as they collaborated on improving teaching and learning.

“We established a routine of teach, assess, reteach and reassess to ensure that every student had opportunities and were expected to pass with at least 80 percent mastery of each major standard and/or topic,” O’Quinn said.

Behavior Intervention

To maintain a healthy learning environment, the school focuses on a multi-interventional approach to behavior. Teachers meet with students, make seat adjustments, assign duties or responsibilities, contact parents, request conferences with the counselor, and meet with parents prior to administrative intervention.

They are also encouraged to discuss students in team meetings to determine possible causes of behavior issues and to learn what is working in other classrooms. “Teachers are given as much control as possible before administrative actions are taken,” O’Quinn said.

After administrative intervention, the school incorporates mentor teachers, behavior interventionists, social workers and others to foster positive experiences for students and help limit their office referrals. Students who display appropriate behaviors receive “rewards” of special items and activities.

Common planning time allows teachers to reinforce the behavioral process, plan lessons that engage students in learning, and provide constant reassessment and monitoring of student success. “We began using weekly benchmark assessments to ensure that students didn’t go long without support for missing skills,” O’Quinn said.

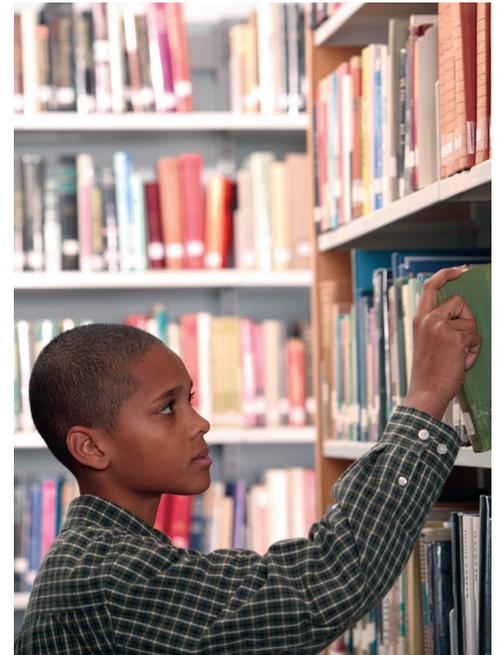
School leaders undertook a realignment of staff to make sure the right people were in the right positions. “The staff bought into the vision for change and worked tirelessly to ensure students were successful,” O’Quinn said.

One major change in the school structure was the master schedule. The school adopted a block schedule with double classes in math and English. “We also went to same-sex classrooms,” O’Quinn said. “This approach, as well as teaming each grade level in separate parts of the building, created a smaller environment for each teacher team to take ownership of learning and ensure that no students would fall through the cracks.”

Extra Help

The staff developed a tiered approach to extra help. In making scheduling decisions, school leaders and teachers looked at students’ state assessment scores to determine groupings that allowed a variety of skill levels in each classroom while grouping together students struggling in similar subject areas to receive intensive assistance. “Students who entered CMS one or more grade levels behind were placed in situations that provided optimal one-on-one ratios with teachers and inclusion personnel to strengthen remediation efforts,” O’Quinn said.

“Each initiative and action was tested against the question, ‘At the end of the day, how will this impact and improve student achievement?’ ” O’Quinn said. “Things that did not get high marks were discontinued.” The use of PBIS and high expectations across the campus ensured that students were exposed to the same things from one classroom to another — something that students could depend upon.



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Jump-Start Student Engagement Through Project-Based Learning

When leaders of **Beverly Magnet School** (BMS), a middle grades school in Dothan, Alabama, met with SREB school improvement consultant **Kathleen McNally** to discuss data results, the focus turned to the need for more student engagement in learning. The result was a schoolwide effort to involve students more actively in authentic studies and to build a collaborative environment in which teachers work together to make learning more rigorous and engaging.

Beginning in fall 2011, grade-level teams of teachers began meeting to plan projects for implementation during the school year. One good example involved students in grade eight designing and building carnival games and donating game proceeds to a local nonprofit selected by students. The project involved students for nine weeks.

The idea for the carnival games project originated from an annual local event. “Dothan hosts the National Peanut Festival each year,” said Assistant Principal **Maria Johnson**. “The fair is a highlight of our community, so a carnival game theme was popular with students and teachers.”

Jennifer Walworth, a science teacher, worked with her colleagues to help students see science as an active component of life outside the classroom. She completed mini-lessons incorporating physical science course of study standards to assist students in completing the design process for the games. Each group of students created a prototype accompanied by a written report describing how a game worked by using concepts from physical science standards.

“The benefits reaped from project-based learning not only helped students but allowed staff members to collaborate in a manner never before experienced,” Johnson said. “Don’t let initial resistance of staff deter you. Once the ground rules are established, the proactive work environment with high expectations will result in success for students and teachers.”

Students used research, writing and presentation skills in language arts classes. Groups of students researched local nonprofits and presented their findings to the class. The charity with the most votes was the recipient of funds raised from the carnival games during field day. In addition, students contacted local businesses to request donations of materials and funds for the charity.

“The interaction with community members provided valuable, authentic learning experiences for our students,” Johnson said. “They were enthusiastic and eager to complete assignments as they worked through the project-based learning. Teachers functioned as facilitators as they guided students through each phase of the project. Students and teachers learned a lot about being flexible as they met challenges and made alterations to improve or tweak the project.”

After students voted for their favorite games, they constructed the top six at full scale for field day. The students operated the games and raised \$1,400 for the charity they selected.

Students and teachers gathered to present an oversized ceremonial check to a city official. With newspaper, radio and television coverage, the carnival games project and the field day event were declared successful. Student engagement was at an all-time high. The degree of collaboration among students, teachers and administrators ensured that the project will be repeated in 2012-2013.

BMS received a *MMGW* Depth of Implementation Award from SREB in 2012.

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Middle Grades Students in the Reading Zone Meet and Track the Goal of 25 Books Annually

By the end of the school year, students will love to read! They will become habitual readers of diverse, rich texts. They will talk about books, write about books and ask for more books. All of this will happen without offering rewards. Students will read because they understand that reading in and of itself is the reward.

This lofty goal established at **Beverly Magnet School** (BMS) in Dothan, Alabama, was pursued for years by Assistant Principal **Maria Johnson** when she was the school’s literacy coach. She reflected, researched and collaborated with other educators about how to reach the goal. “I identified the challenges and made several attempts to convince students that reading is important to academic success,” Johnson said.

The essential questions were: How can we reach the goal without revamping every language arts classroom in the building? How can the literacy coach support reading across the school?

Johnson implemented a new plan based on fundamental practices from *The Reading Zone* by Nancie Atwell, which contains ideas aimed specifically at middle grades students. The plan began with the creation of a comfortable place for students to read. Part of the media center was sectioned off and marked with a banner proclaiming “Beverlye Wildcats’ Reading Zone.” Johnson worked with the media specialist and classroom teachers to ensure the Reading Zone was filled with great reading materials and students had the time to read.

Teachers and students in grades six and seven participated in a series of lessons to introduce the Reading Zone. The lessons were taught by Johnson in the media center with teachers providing follow-up in the classroom.

- **Data Sharing** — In this lesson, students reviewed state exam scores, set goals for reading and learned about connections between reading and academic achievement.
- **How to Choose a Just-Right Book** — Students learned how to select books appropriate for independent reading. They heard about the challenges of sitting quietly and reading, what good readers do when their minds wander and how to practice getting lost in a great book.
- **Book Pass** — This lesson exposed students to a wide variety of books. Using one-minute readings, students were able to explore books quickly, rate the books and share the results with students at their tables.
- **Dilemma: How Can We Share Books?** — As students began to read more and ask adults to recommend books, they developed a way to write book reviews and share books with others through a display in the media center. The reviews were placed online as a blog organized by book genre and title.
- **Book Reviews** — This lesson taught students to write book reviews that went beyond summarizing and into analyzing the elements of writing in the books. Students received a template for a basic review and a more complex framework for an analysis of the writing.
- **Genre Talks and Fiction With Friends** — Students sat in groups according to their favorite genres — adventure, autobiographies, biographies, drama, fantasy, folktales and myths, “girly-girl,” historical, informational, mystery, poetry, realistic, science fiction, and sports. They shared information about their favorite books and encouraged others to read what they had enjoyed. A section of the media center is known as Fiction With Friends. It is devoted to titles with multiple copies so that students can organize mini-book clubs as a way to build enthusiasm for reading.



“The most notable reward to me is that students are reading more voluntarily and are talking about what they are reading.”

Maria Johnson, Beverlye Magnet School

In addition to the lessons given to jump-start the reading program, students participated in other sessions as needed to learn specific reading skills. They learned about vocabulary, understanding of an author’s style and purposes of reading. “The staff was amazed at how quickly students began diving into books and discussing what they were reading,” Johnson said. “The lessons hit the spot. They served to convince students that books are awesome.”

Johnson saw students reading in the hall and in the lunchroom, before and after school, and in every content area. Students began asking for specific titles and sharing information on their favorite authors. Teachers reported trading books with students. Every teacher in the building posts a sign outside the classroom: [Teacher’s Name] is reading [Name of Book] by [Author]. These signs promote discussion and demonstrate that teachers are avid readers, too.

“The connection between achievement scores and the amount of reading done by students is well-supported in research,” Johnson said. “We decided not to use personal reading logs but to track the amount of reading through use of classroom reading logs. Everything the students read in class is posted on a laminated chart — nonfiction, technical reading, and newspaper and magazine articles. We will continue to use the charts to remind the students of the goal of reading 25 books per year.”

The greatest gains in reading were seen in grade six, where the Advanced scores improved from 88 percent in 2010-2011 to 91 percent in 2011-2012. Within the sixth grade, gains were made by male students, black students and low-income students. “The most notable reward to me is that students are reading more voluntarily and are talking about what they are reading,” Johnson said “They are reading not because there is a grade or a reward tied to the reading but because they are learning to love the intrinsic rewards that come with reading.”

At the end of the school year, media center circulation and student enthusiasm for reading and talking about books served as evidence of success of the Reading Zone project. Student surveys also reflected an appreciation for the new approach to reading. Students reported having choices and more time to read. “We love being able to read just for the fun of it. We are reading more than last year.” *Finally, all grade levels met the goal of 25 books per year as students began to grow into lifelong readers.*

The next steps for the school will be to introduce students in grade six to beginning lessons in the media center and to cultivate what was started with students in grades seven and eight. The school also plans to introduce a writing workshop in every language arts classroom.

BMS received an *MMGW* Depth of Implementation Award from SREB in 2012.

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Data Walls With Remediation and Enrichment Activities Encourage Independent Learners

The walls have gone up in every classroom at **Broadmoor Middle Laboratory School** in Shreveport, Louisiana — data walls, that is. Using identification numbers rather than names to ensure confidentiality, students are able to view their progress and set goals for improvement.

Students are assessed frequently to determine what they know and need to know. Teachers in each subject give focus quizzes containing four multiple-choice questions and one constructive response. When results go up on the walls, students and teachers see what steps to take next. “I do classroom walkthroughs every other week to check the data walls to make sure they are high quality and appropriately updated,” said Assistant Principal **Samoine Holmes**.

Students who score 80 percent or above on a focus quiz go to a pride enrichment class during eighth period. These engaging classes are designed to help students learn new things and/or enhance their knowledge in a particular subject. “We created the enrichment classes to get students excited about learning,” Holmes said. “Students tend to work harder if they know something fun and rewarding is waiting for them.” Some of the enrichment activities include creating a Bill of Rights song and performance, Business Startup 101, class Monopoly, and Greek gods.

Remediation has been designed for students who score below 80 percent on the focus quizzes. The purpose is to reteach the content so students will be successful in the future. “Remediation is time consuming because the teacher needs to develop another lesson,” said mathematics teacher **Sommer Anderson-Picou**. “If students don’t learn it the first time, it’s useless to repeat the lesson the same way.” The payoff for teachers and students is preparing more students to participate in the enrichment period.

It took the school three years to complete the process of using data walls, enrichment and remediation. “We attended the *High Schools That Work* summer conference, where we heard ideas from other schools,” Holmes said.

“Our SREB school improvement consultant helped us put together the plan, and it has been a big success,” Holmes continued. “As a result of SREB, our school exited the Louisiana academic watch list this year and has become a School of Choice. We finally hit the target that has given us recognition as a school on the rise. We look forward to seeing how far the SREB strategies will take us.”

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One Book, One School: Using the *MMGW* Design to Build Literacy Across the Curriculum

The literacy focus team at **Hopper Middle School** (HMS) in Cypress, Texas, has created a way to involve every student, teacher and staff member in literacy across the curriculum, one of the *Making Middle Grades Work* (*MMGW*) Key Practices. The effort also combines two other *MMGW* Key Practices — a rigorous academic core and student engagement — to ensure students are reading and writing for learning in every classroom.

The 14-member team includes representatives of every content area and all electives. It meets before school once a month and communicates via email during the school year. The team has assisted all other content area teachers to refine, review and develop literacy activities related to the goals outlined in the SREB publication *Literacy Across the Curriculum*.

“The team believes that all students need to read and write, talk knowledgeably about their reading and writing, and learn to listen effectively to others,” said **Rebecca Novotny**, school librarian and team leader. “We are taking our responsibility seriously for planning, implementing and monitoring the school’s progress in getting students to read and write for learning in all classes.”

Making Real Progress

Teachers in all subjects are requiring students to read more and write more. Many teachers have started including short essay responses on exams and in classroom assignments.

The first attempt to promote whole-school reading occurred in the weekly advisory period when every student received an article to read, discuss and respond to questions. The articles were on a variety of topics; some came from the news while others were created by teachers on real-world themes. The topics included the origins of April Fools' Day, an account of a young Texas woman who received multiple honors for her softball skills and wildfires in east Texas.

December 20, 2011, was a memorable day at HMS. On the last day before school adjourned for the holidays, all 1,300 students received the book *Schooled* by Paul Langdon. The entire day was devoted to reading the book — one or more chapters per class period. The principal, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, the school safety officer, teachers, teachers' aides and volunteers joined students in a day-long reading exercise known as One Book, One School. The literacy team set the scene by providing a summary of the book:

Lionel's only interest is playing basketball at Bluford High, but he's having problems off court. His father thinks basketball is a waste of time and his teachers, unaware of Lionel's problems with reading, are threatening to fail him. Meanwhile, his dropout friend Jamar wants Lionel to drop out. Now Lionel must make a choice about what to do.

After reading the book, the students wrote a summary paragraph on the story and prepared to complete a culminating activity that consisted of discussions in their classes on the importance of doing your best and preparing for college and careers.

Book reading options included: 1) The teacher could read the chapter out loud; 2) Students could read the chapter out loud; or 3) Students and teachers could take turns reading the chapters. For background information on each chapter, students and teachers could access a *Schooled* website at <https://sites.google.com/site/hopper1book1school2011/home>. "The website was created from lesson plans provided by teachers and Townsend Press and was created by English teacher Kristi Witt," Novotny said. The website consists of vocabulary, comprehension questions, discussion questions, figurative language and additional sources for each chapter.

A Wall Wisher website, <http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/HMSOneBookOneSchool>, was created for students and teachers to share their thoughts about the book by posting brief messages on a "wall" for others to read.

"Every student left for the holidays with a book that they could read and share with their families," Novotny said. "Because almost 80 percent of our students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, many students took home a book from school to keep for the first time."

Reading emphasis is reflected in students' reading achievement scores. On the 2011 TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) reading exam, 69 percent of students in grade six met the standard, 65 percent of students in grade seven met the standard, and 73 percent of students in grade eight met the standard. The 2012 STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) reading test showed that 85 percent of students in grade six made the cut score of 50 out of 100; 84 percent of students in grade seven made the cut score, and 84 percent of students in grade eight made the cut score. Hopper Middle School did not make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in 2011 but succeeded in 2012.

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Pacesetter High Schools Use the *HSTW* Key Practices to Improve Learning Experiences



Using the *HSTW* Design: Preparing Students for College and Employment

Many schools across the nation are choosing the *HSTW* improvement design and implementing the 10 Key Practices in preparing students to graduate from high school and receive postsecondary schooling or training. Three award-winning *HSTW* sites in three states — Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio — shared how they raised the bar and developed strategies for higher student achievement.

Blackman High School (BHS) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, received an *HSTW* Platinum High Achievement Award from SREB in 2012. The honor exemplifies the progress a school can make when leaders embrace change and support improvement efforts. Schools receiving the award are model *HSTW* sites that deeply implement the *HSTW* design, teach students a rigorous curriculum linked to a program of study and experience high achievement as a result.

BHS opened in 2000 and is now the largest high school in Tennessee with an enrollment of nearly 2,400 students. “We are constantly changing, constantly evolving,” said Assistant Principal **John Strickland**. The goal of BHS is to graduate students with the academic knowledge and career/technical (CT) skills needed for success in life. BHS had a graduation rate of more than 95 percent in 2012.

The guidance and advisement program at BHS is an important factor in students’ success. Students in grade nine work with guidance counselors to develop a four-year plan. “Students choose a career focus after the ninth grade,” Strickland said. “Students

often change their majors after entering college. We try to expose students to their options in high school so that they don’t lose time by changing majors in college.”

BHS students are involved in many cross-curricular activities. For example, they learn how mathematics is related to audiovisual or other studies. “It shows students that there is a correlation to everything we teach,” Strickland said.

To raise literacy skills, BHS promotes reading across the curriculum. Students in all subject areas work to improve their writing skills. The mathematics department adopts books that students are required to read outside the school day. All English teachers meet to discuss scoring of reading and writing assignments. “We don’t teach standard English,” Strickland said. “We teach honors English.”

All BHS teachers are assigned to professional learning communities (PLCs) where they create common assessments given to students. The teachers examine all of the assessments to determine which questions the students missed and then discuss how to reteach those items. They also look at the teaching strategies in classes where students did not miss questions on the formative assessment. “This procedure has helped us to score the highest in our county on all statewide end-of-course tests,” Strickland said. After meeting and evaluating all data in the PLCs, teachers make individual assessment plans for all students based on data from the formative assessments.

Ninety-five percent of BHS students complete at least two of the three parts of the *HSTW*-recommended academic core. Eighty-six percent report receiving intensive guidance and advisement services.

Boyd County High School (BCHS) in Ashland, Kentucky, received the *HSTW* Gold Achievement Award from SREB in 2012. The award is given to schools where students experience a rigorous CT curriculum and at least 50 percent earn the *HSTW* Award of Educational Achievement based on performance on the *HSTW* Assessment of reading, mathematics and science. To earn the Award of Educational Achievement, students meet all three readiness goals on the *HSTW* Assessment, complete the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum in at least two subjects and complete a concentration in the humanities, mathematics and science, or a CT major.

Principal **Rhonda Salisbury** reports that BCBS is strengthening its CT education program. The school completed a pilot project in 2011-2012 with a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program. “The STEM academy was totally project-based,” Salisbury said. “Twenty-five sophomores with various levels of academic achievement participated in the academy. At the end of the first year, all 25 students were deemed college- and career-ready.”

BCBS also uses the HAWKES learning system, a computer software program designed to increase student achievement in mathematics. Seniors use the program to prepare for college without remedial mathematics. “We saw great increases in math scores,” Salisbury said. “Students graduated meeting the benchmark in math.”

Hicksville High School (HHS) in Hicksville, Ohio, serves students in grades seven through 12. SREB honored HHS with a pacesetter *MMGW* award for 2011-2013 and a pacesetter *HSTW* award for 2010-2012.

About 40 percent of juniors and seniors attend career centers. Senior projects are a graduation requirement at HHS. Students complete projects that they present to a panel of judges.

School Wins Awards by Adhering to the *HSTW* Design

Bonney Lake High School (BLHS) in Bonney Lake, Washington, was designed and constructed to be an *HSTW* site. For seven years, it has implemented the *HSTW* school improvement design with fidelity. As a result, the school was recognized as a Designated Innovative School by the state of Washington in 2011 and as a National Pacesetter School by SREB in 2012.

BLHS enrolls 1,353 students. Eighty-three percent are white, 5.76 percent Hispanic, 2.29 percent Asian, 2.29 percent Native American, 2.22 percent black and 4.44 percent other ethnicities.

Principal **Linda Masteller** noted the school where she served as principal prior to BLHS was also an *HSTW* site. “Using information from our first Technical Assistance Visit, we were able to make some very important changes in how we delivered curriculum and worked with students at that school,” Masteller said. “The result was that we greatly increased student achievement. Therefore, when we had an opportunity to design a new school, we wanted to create one that would facilitate small learning communities, develop regular opportunities for teachers to work together and create an environment of high expectations. The plan for BLHS has proven to be a success.”

Another requirement is for each senior to complete a science project. “The teacher models what a good science project looks like,” Principal **Jeremy Kuhlman** said. “We display the projects in the school gym so that community members can view and judge them.”

SREB Senior Vice President **Gene Bottoms** said projects like the ones at HHS demonstrate that CT education is more than just shop class instruction. “Students step up their efforts to complete outstanding projects when they know their work is authentic and will be judged by someone outside the school.”

HHS has had success with a program dubbed STARS (Stop Talking and Read Something). Students read what they enjoy — not just textbooks. Administrators and teachers read at the same time.

Another emphasis at HHS is on mathematics. “We have fantastic math teachers who are available before and after school and are always encouraging students to perform at a higher level,” Kuhlman said. HHS uses mathematics labs for remediation with students who fail to grasp the concepts. “The labs are also being used this year to accelerate learning by promoting reasoning and understanding,” he said.

HHS supports continuous improvement through guidance, advisement and extra help. Each teacher serves as a “parent on campus” to provide assistance when their “step kids” are having problems. Many teachers have Facebook accounts through which they can help students outside of school.

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BLHS leaders and teachers use the results of state assessments, course failure rates, Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment and dropout rates to determine progress in raising student achievement.

- Scores on state assessments rose in mathematics, reading, writing and science between 2010 and 2011.
- The failure rates for freshmen and sophomores average from 5 percent to 15 percent for all core courses.
- The AP enrollment has tripled since 2009. BLHS offers a rigorous academic core aligned with the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum.
- The school has one of the lowest dropout rates of any school in the county: The rate was 1.6 percent in 2010.

Bonney Lake High School's success is based on a number of initiatives aimed at preparing students for college and careers. BLHS believes in engaging students intellectually, socially, emotionally and behaviorally.

- *HSTW* is the model for teacher hiring and professional development. Posters highlighting the 10 Key Practices have been placed throughout the school building as a reminder of what the school is trying to accomplish. Staff members are encouraged to attend the annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference and other events. Teachers who attend such offerings bring information to the staff and conduct mini-workshops during staff development time.
- The teaming model for grades nine and 10 connects mathematics, English and science instruction with grade-level administrators, counselors and learning specialists. The teaching teams share approximately 90 students in a block of three 60-minute periods in adjoining rooms. They also share a common plan and office space where they can meet together. The grade-level administrator, a counselor and a learning specialist meet on a regular basis to discuss students' specific needs. "Communication with parents is vital," Masteller said. "Our teachers contact parents regularly."
- Extra help is built into the school day. Students receive team support during a designated 30-minute period each Friday.
- The advisory program uses innovative curricula and structure to nurture student growth personally and academically. The advisory program includes after-graduation planning and embedded Response to Intervention (RTI) time that matches students with peer tutors and mentor teachers. Student-led conferences with parents are scheduled twice a year.
- The student leadership model has created innovative programs such as Winter Wishes, which grants the need-based desires of as many students as possible each year.
- The schoolwide mentor program pairs every freshman and new student with two to three upperclassmen to help newcomers transition into high school.



"We are extremely pleased with our student success rates and the collaboration efforts of staff. Our staff members put students first, and it shows."

Linda Masteller, Bonney Lake High School

"We are extremely pleased with our student success rates and the collaboration efforts of staff," Masteller said. "Our staff members put students first, and it shows."

The school will continue to develop advisories as students' needs and state requirements change. It has added RTI time for all students in the weekly schedule to create more opportunities for students to receive extra help. The teacher leadership model has made PLCs a vital part of all activities. Teachers meet weekly during late starts to work on curriculum, assessments and instructional techniques.

"The 10 Key Practices of *High Schools That Work* are at the forefront of all we do," Masteller said. "They are definitely a blueprint for success."

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One High School Succeeds With a Planned Journey From Low-Performing to Most-Improved

Five years ago, **Crockett High School** (CHS) in Austin, Texas, was in decline. Attendance was down. Students were dropping out. The percentage of at-risk students was one of the highest of any school in the district. CHS was designated Academically Unacceptable by the Texas Education Agency in 2007-2008 and did not meet federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). “We had to make changes,” Assistant Principal **Kori Crawford** said.

After years of determined effort, CHS was recognized by SREB in 2010-2012 as one of the 80 most-improved schools in the *HSTW* initiative.

An urban school that enrolls 1,600 students, CHS experienced a 23 percent increase in disadvantaged students during the past five years. The school is also undergoing a significant demographic shift: rise in the enrollment of Hispanic students has resulted in a 75 percent “minority-majority” population.

The first step in improvement at CHS was to develop a five-year plan that would communicate a shared vision. The plan serves to focus the staff on the importance of student achievement. Teachers are given time to work together in preparing students for college and careers. They meet in professional development sessions on Friday, where they share strategies effective in the classroom.

Color-Coding Students' Progress

A new data system helps staff identify students who need assistance. The data report includes attendance, past credit accumulation, current passing rate, suspensions and special education status for each student. Several items are rated, and an overall score is calculated. Each student receives a color code to indicate progress. For example, a dark green color indicates a student is on track to graduate, has exemplary attendance and is passing all courses. A student receiving a dark green color might participate in a schedule review to ensure his or her program of study is sufficiently challenging. A yellow code indicates that timely graduation is in doubt: The student is absent more than twice a month and is passing some courses. This type of student is interviewed to determine the reasons for the absences, receives career counseling and participates in a review of all courses causing difficulties. Administrators and teachers track students and update colors every six weeks.

CHS also initiated student insight groups run by adults in student support roles such as counselor, dropout prevention specialist or special education department chair. The adults determine what is wrong with the student’s school experience and why he or she is failing. Then they work with students to help them pass their courses. “The insight groups have been vital in changing the learning environment at Crockett High School,” said Principal **Craig Shapiro**. “Putting students in the right groups in the right areas and reaching students before they hit rock bottom has helped to prevent many of the absentee and behavior issues.”

School Takes Action to Raise Mathematics Achievement

While **Crockett High School** (CHS) in Austin, Texas, was implementing a five-year plan to raise student achievement, the CHS mathematics department was making definite strides to improve students’ mathematics knowledge and skills.

Mathematics teachers used data-driven instruction to monitor student performance on skill and unit assessments to understand where students were struggling and disconnecting from learning. The department then created common assessments and common skill assessments to promote consistency within the grading system. “It forced us to look to students’ work to gain insights into instruction,” said **Manjula Nookala**, a mathematics instructional specialist who is now an assistant principal at Del Valle High School in Del Valle, Texas. Mathematics teachers at CHS meet as a group every Friday to discuss strategies for raising student achievement.

Improvement efforts included implementing a rigorous mathematics curriculum built on three key concepts:

- Increase the level of questioning in the classroom.
- Increase the number of higher-level thinking questions.
- Increase the number of performance tasks required of students.

The school introduced intensive interventions before, during and after school. At the conclusion of each unit, students were assigned one of the three or four skills to master and then worked with a teacher to prepare for a retest.

By 2011, mathematics class assessments represented 90 percent of students’ grades, while homework and participation made up 10 percent. Teachers had increased the rigor of assignments and assessments. They had incorporated more proficient- and mastery-level questions and reduced the number of below-basic questions.

Mathematics scores and class attendance have increased dramatically at CHS during the past few years. The mathematics department exceeded by six percentage points its 2011-2012 goal of a 70 percent passing rate for freshmen on the state’s STAAR exam. The goal for 2012-2013 is to increase the passing rate to 80 percent.

The mathematics department’s success is reflected in CHS recognition by SREB as one of the top 80 most-improved *HSTW* sites in the nation in 2010-2012.

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In another effort to benefit students, the school district created the Lone Star Circle of Care. Psychologists rent space on campus where they are available to meet with students. “Students with family or addiction issues are more likely to get into trouble,” Shapiro said.

Standards-Based Grading

Another major change at CHS was the adoption of a standards-based grading (SBG) system to assess what students have actually learned. The system measures students’ knowledge of grade-level content and skills by reporting the most recent, consistent level of performance. If students struggle in the first few weeks of a course and make low grades but grasp the content at a proficient level by the second half of the course, they are not penalized by the early grades. Those students are reported as proficient, and their grades reflect current performance levels.

The changes at CHS have resulted in impressive improvements. Students have stopped transferring out of the school and more students are enrolling. “We now have the highest attendance growth of any high school in Austin,” Shapiro said. “We have a 9 percent increase in the graduation rate, and 100 percent of seniors apply to college. Crockett students received a total of 10.5 million dollars in scholarships and grants in 2012.”

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High-Minority School Achieves ‘Good Standing’ Using the *HSTW* Design

Jackson Central-Merry High School (JCM) in Jackson, Tennessee, serves a 90 percent minority student population. More than 95 percent of the school’s 702 students come from economically disadvantaged homes. With poor performances on state exams, a low graduation rate and a toxic school culture in which students rebelled and teachers were demoralized, JCM urgently needed a fresh start.

The district implemented a restructuring plan in 2009. It named a new principal, **Eric Jones**, and a new administrative staff. Only 60 percent of the faculty kept their jobs after reapplying for their positions.

One factor that contributed to school unrest was the opening of two new schools, including an academic magnet school across the street from JCM in a building formerly part of the JCM campus. By 2003 enrollment at JCM had dropped to below 500; teachers and students felt inferior to those at the “academic” school across the street. “Students who remained at JCM were disheartened and concerned about the future,” Jones said. (See poem titled “*JCM*” by 2012 graduate **Destany Wyatt** on page 13.)

Implementing *HSTW*

After restructuring the existing faculty and hiring new teachers, the new principal began meeting with *HSTW* consultants to institute structural reform and leadership accountability. The school began implementing the *HSTW* Key Practices for school improvement, starting with higher expectations.

By the opening of the 2010-2011 school year, JCM had made suitable progress to avoid state takeover and could focus on improving school culture and student achievement. The *HSTW* Key Practices provided direction and meaning to the comprehensive school improvement plan and helped create multiple programs of academic and career/technical studies to prepare students for postsecondary education and careers.



“Teachers and administrators work together to improve instruction by using the state evaluation rubric and preparation for the implementation of common core standards.”

Eric Jones, Jackson Central-Merry High School

In raising standards, teachers were expected to be consistent and accountable. Despite the fact that many students came from tough home situations, teachers had to hold students to higher standards. “The staff needed to help students learn so that they wouldn’t be trapped in the same situations after graduation,” Jones said. “The real world wouldn’t cut them any slack, and neither could the teachers.”

District Meetings

Leaders from JCM met in monthly round-table discussions with district personnel to create a shared vision. The district gave JCM administrators flexibility to make decisions that would benefit the school and its students.

Teachers met in professional learning communities (PLCs) after school to discuss how best to improve student achievement and teacher instruction. “The weekly meetings and the freedom to grow were crucial,” Jones said. “The faculty needed to know that school leaders had their best interests at heart.”

By 2011-2012 the school realized major improvements in instructional practices, student achievement and school culture. JCM made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time since the start of *No Child Left Behind*. Students became more involved in the learning process and even contributed ideas to make learning more meaningful. The JCM graduation rate rose from 57 percent in 2009 to 88 percent in 2012.

Teachers in the PLCs began exploring literacy across the curriculum to tackle the reading and writing difficulties of students. In 2011 a reading exam for students in grade nine confirmed the suspicion that students were not reading on grade level. In fact, 70 percent of ninth-graders were reading at or below the fifth-grade level. Half of that 70 percent were reading at or below the third-grade level.

JCM leaders organized a literacy council of teachers and administrators to address the issue of schoolwide literacy, to research best practices and strategies for improving students' reading skills, and to model the strategies for the faculty. "The structural dynamic of teacher-learner and teacher-leader continues to work well in JCM's professional learning communities," Jones said. "Teachers and administrators work together to improve instruction by using the state evaluation rubric and preparation for the implementation of common core standards."

Senior Student Poem: "JCM" by Destany Wyatt

I walked through the doors as a JCM freshman,
Wondering if the rumors are true. Can I withstand?
It's fair to say I was "iffy" at first,
Wondering if anything could be much worse.

Rumors about JCM were scary and mean.
Students who care about grades were not part of the scene.
What the school lacked was a stern leader
Who focused on making each one an achiever.

My sophomore year we received that stern figure.
Some began realizing that this was the start of our future.
JCM, once a place I started off fearing,
Has become a place I will leave with eyes tearing.

Some students liked JCM more four years ago,
Only because it was a facility of free flow.

Impact of Changes at JCM

After four years of declining ACT scores, the scores on ACT reading and the ACT average composite score increased by almost half a point. In addition, JCM's average writing scores exceeded the state standard of Proficiency for the first time in at least four years of data.

The school administered the Gates-MacGinitie reading assessment to students in grade nine in 2011 and again in 2012 in grade 10. "The 95 students for whom we have data improved an average of 131 Lexile levels — the equivalent of 1 1/2 to two grade levels in reading," said Assistant Principal **Teresa McDaniel**.

"The *HSTW* Key Practices served as a foundation for continued school improvement at JCM, and we know we are headed in the right direction," Jones said. "We intend to continue the steady pattern of school population growth, student achievement, faculty capacity, and increased parent and community involvement."

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Now some realize it's a place for growth and maturity
Physically, mentally, and academically.
Scores are on the rise,
Which to many comes as a surprise.

Students are more focused on their learning.
I wish you could see the corners they are turning.
So now, I am proud to say
That I will graduate from JCM in May.

With the knowledge I need, I leave with a smile
To begin my journey prepared for life's extra mile.
I leave with good memories and many friends.
I am proud to graduate in the top 10.

I thank my JCM family for giving me the strength,
The education and the maturity
That I need to succeed.

School Responds to Community's Expectations for Student Achievement

Student success is critical for teachers and administrators at **Siloam Springs High School** (SSHS) in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. The school has developed a comprehensive plan to ensure continuous student improvement, beginning with incoming freshmen.

SSHS enrolls 1,200 students in grades nine through 12. The demographic makeup is 70 percent white, 23 percent Hispanic and the remaining 7 percent either black or Hmong. Half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

The school enjoys the support of a close-knit community and nearby corporations including J. B. Hunt, Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods. "The community holds us accountable for student achievement," said Vice Principal **Jason Jones**.

U.S. News and World Report named SSHS one of the best high schools in the nation for 2011-2012. SREB honored the school with an *HSTW* Gold Improvement Award in 2007 and Pacesetter School recognition for 2008-2012.

SSHS has many examples of actions that contribute to continuous improvement:

- The transition program for incoming freshmen is called UpLink. Seniors mentor students in grade nine. Both seniors and freshmen take part in experiential learning that includes active engagement. One example is a "scenario" game in which small groups of students work together to resolve a particular situation. In monthly class meetings, freshmen meet with their mentors to hear guest speakers or participate in ice-breaker activities. "We do not have data yet, but another high school in northwest Arkansas that offers a similar program has shown improvements in grades and discipline over a two-year period," Jones said.
- A guaranteed curriculum (one that all teachers commit to teach) includes equal time for learning for all students. The curriculum taught is the one being assessed.
- Courses have common pacing and common assessments.
- The levels of student intervention include schoolwide, targeted and intensive.
- Teachers have common planning time and participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) where they are able to vote on topics of study.
- Peer tutors participate in student remediation at a certain time.
- The strong career/technical program leads to industry certifications.
- Students participate in a variety of clubs and organizations.

Siloam Springs High School can point to many examples of success in raising student achievement.

- Of the combined population of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in a three-year period from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011, mathematics scores on end-of-course exams rose from 74.9 percent to 86.2 percent. In the same years, the low socioeconomic status (SES) population (students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches) also made gains, moving from 67.7 percent to 80.9 percent scoring Proficient or Advanced.
- The combined population of students had literacy scores that grew from 56.7 percent scoring Proficient or Advanced in 2008-2009 to 72 percent in 2010-2011. The low SES students progressed from 35.6 percent Proficient or Advanced in 2008-2009 to 56.6 percent in 2010-2011.
- ACT composite scores remained above the state average in 2012. The SSHS average was 21.7, while the state average was 20.3.
- The number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams grew from 114 in 2009 to 169 in 2012. The number indicates that more students are interested in taking the rigorous AP courses now than in the past.

"Through continued community support and high expectations, Siloam Springs High School is committed to changing lives through educational excellence today and in the future," said Principal **Charlie Abernathy**.

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Principal Uses a Systematic Approach to Change School Culture and Raise Student Achievement

South Grand Prairie High School (referred to as South High School) in Grand Prairie, Texas, used a systematic plan to move from barely acceptable performance to well-deserved recognition for student achievement. The gains did not happen overnight. They are the result of six years of identifying instructional gaps, developing a campus culture of success and providing staff development on a number of instructional strategies.

South is a comprehensive high school for 2,352 students in grades 10 through 12. The cultural and economic diversity of the school represents the multicultural makeup of the sprawling Dallas/Fort Worth area. Student demographics are 49 percent Hispanic, 27 percent black, 18 percent white and 6 percent Asian. Fifty-two percent of students are economically disadvantaged.



“When students know the teacher has heart and is genuinely interested in them, they are more likely to give their best effort to academic success.”

Donna Grant, South Grand Prairie High School

The 2012 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) showed that South excelled in all categories across all demographic groups. In 2006 the school exceeded 80 percent Proficiency in only two of 16 accountability student groups. By 2012 the school exceeded 80 percent passing on 14 of the 16 student groups and 90 percent on eight of the 16 student groups.

Identifying the Need

The school hosted an SREB Technical Assistance Visit in 2006 led by an *HSTW* consultant and a group of educators. “The visit was an eye-opener for leaders and staff,” Principal **Donna Grant** said. “It helped us develop a clearer vision of where we needed to be.”

Grant is a systems thinker who saw the need for a common language to get the entire staff to pull together to raise achievement. Using the *HSTW* 10 Key Practices as a guide,

the faculty focused on what they called “The Fundamental Five” as a common framework for expectations:

- **Frame the Lesson** — This fundamental refers to the teacher-developed lesson design template or format used for planning instruction at South. The objective is to maximize student achievement through WICR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading) strategies embedded in campus initiatives and to systematically plan for lesson delivery that emphasizes rigor, relevance, critical thinking skills and real-world applications of content.
- **Work in the Power Zone** — Teacher engagement with students is best accomplished when teachers move through the classroom. Instead of the front-of-the-class lecture style of lesson delivery, leaders and teachers at South believe close proximity to students promotes student engagement, monitoring and checking for understanding. Being in the Power Zone contributes to developing positive teacher-student relationships and keeps disciplinary infractions at a minimum.
- **Use Frequent Small-Group Purposeful Talk** — A new schedule was developed to provide common planning time for staff. All teachers teach five of seven periods daily; they use one of the two non-teaching periods for common planning. All teachers use a common lesson cycle and discuss their lesson plans in built-in professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers focus on planning engaging instruction and assessment during PLC time. In these sessions, teachers ensure an aligned curriculum with an emphasis on state standards and product-based assessments. Teachers also work together to develop targeted enrichment for students and extra help when needed to help all students succeed. “Purposeful talk is essential,” Grant said. “It is a method for getting staff to buy into and support the improvement effort.”
- **Recognize and Reinforce** — When staff members make a conscious effort to affirm achievement and recognize students for well-done work, they create and promote a positive atmosphere that is conducive to student learning. “When students know the teacher has heart and is genuinely interested in them, they are more likely to give their best effort to academic success,” Grant said.
- **Write Critically** — The staff at South believes a formative assessment should occur every day during every class period so that there are qualitative and/or quantitative data to support the belief that learning has occurred each day. The teacher typically accomplishes the end result by asking a critical or driving question and getting students to respond in writing. “This is an excellent way to check for student understanding and to monitor and improve writing skills,” Grant said.

Grant and her staff conducted walkthroughs so that teachers could observe each other in the classroom. She used an accountability form that recorded the teacher's location in the classroom (work area, Power Zone, lecture position or not in room), the lesson framing or delivery that was taking place (state standards, objectives and closing questions posted), monitoring understanding, student practices and teacher practices.

Looking to the future, South staff members know they must continue to grow and improve. They are focusing more heavily on refining programs of study that promote career pathways. The Health Science Center, which emphasizes sports medicine, was established in 2012 and an environmental science pathway is ready for implementation in 2013-2014.

"Teachers are becoming more adept in planning project-based learning experiences for their students," Grant said. A number of staff members are receiving training in the PBL approach to lesson delivery.

"The staff at South is committed to a continuous improvement approach that promotes student achievement," Grant said. "Teachers have been trained to use data to drive instruction and are believers in the systematic approach that was implemented with assistance from *HSTW* and the Key Practices. Our school has a positive environment and teachers have genuine compassion for students. We are proud of the improvements that have helped us close achievement gaps and promote college and career readiness."

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Career/Technical High School Uses the *HSTW* Design to Implement Small Learning Communities

Queens Vocational and Technical High School (QVTHS) in Long Island City, New York, has undergone major improvements after using the *HSTW* design to implement small learning communities (SLCs) in 2006. The school enrolls 1,350 students; 70 percent are Hispanic, 10 percent black, 10 percent Asian and 10 percent are white.

The school registered a C in 2007, a B in 2008, improving to a high B in 2009 and an A in 2010 on the New York City Progress Report. The 2008 *HSTW* Assessment showed that the school made a 25 percentage-point gain in literacy from 2006 to 2008. The four-year graduation rate increased from 46 percent in 2007 to 74.5 percent in 2011. "We're hoping to hit 80 percent in the future," said Principal **Melissa Burg**. The school achieved 90 percent attendance in 2011.

A low performance rating prompted QVTHS to implement SLCs. Evidence shows that organizing large schools into smaller units such as SLCs or career academies can have many positive outcomes:

- Better attendance
- More student satisfaction with school
- Higher passing rates and credits earned
- Increased retention and graduation rates
- Increased postsecondary participation and completion
- Better wages upon career entry
- Increased sense of safety
- Greater parent involvement and satisfaction
- Sense of empowerment and efficacy among teachers

The *HSTW* framework for SLCs consists of four elements:

- Creating an effective structure (*HSTW*-recommended core curriculum, challenging academic and career/technical (CT) courses, work-based learning)
- Building a system of shared leadership (data usage, continuous improvement, leadership expectations, leadership support for teachers)
- Developing rigorous and relevant instructional practices (student work benchmarked to standards, high expectations in classrooms, relevant instruction, project-based learning)
- Supporting students and teachers (academic and career guidance, evaluation of advisement program, parent involvement, extra help)



"It's hard for most students to make the transition from the middle grades to a more demanding high school setting... A small learning environment builds confidence and capability to master high school content."

Joanna Kister, SREB

QVTHS decided to organize students and teachers into four schools plus a credit recovery program:

- School of Exploration and Discovery (for all ninth-graders)
- School of Skilled Building Trades (plumbing and electrical installation)
- School of Entrepreneurial Studies (business, cosmetology, graphic arts)
- School of Computer and Electronic Engineering Technologies (A+ computer repair, robotics, fiber optics)
- Advance Academy (credit recovery program) — Repeating ninth-graders take a mix of classes from grades nine, 10 and 11. Students with 0 to 3 credits forego CT education to catch up on academics.

“We started with the ninth-grade academy and later added the small schools for students in grades 10 through 12,” Burg said. “The teachers resisted change at first, but they readily came aboard when good things began to happen.”

SREB consultant **Joanna Kister** has worked with leaders and teachers at QVTHS for the past six years. She strongly supports the ninth-grade academy as well as the small schools. “It’s hard for most students to make the transition from the middle grades to a more demanding high school setting,” Kister said. “The testing is high stakes and the students may have trouble understanding the importance of academic and technical studies to their futures. A small learning environment builds confidence and capability to master high school content.”

A teacher in an SLC has the same group of students for three years (grades 10 through 12). By meeting everyday, teachers get to know their students and their needs. The support system in a SLC is strong: Teachers talk about what is happening in the classroom and what is needed by students to succeed. They form relationships with students so that they can assist with academics or behavior.

Burg said it is very important for teachers in the SLCs to have common planning time so that they can focus on creating a culture of high expectations, analyze data, support struggling students and provide personalized advisory experiences for students. Common planning time is available daily.

Extra help is a vital component of SLCs. The services include after-school tutoring twice per week, night classes, teachers’ office hours during student lunch periods or common prep periods, and additional after-school learning for CT students. “The extra-help opportunities are designed to get students on track, keep them on track and increase student achievement and graduation rates,” Burg said.

The school was rated “well developed” in an external quality review in spring 2012. “The reviewer was very impressed by the collaborative culture of the school,” Kister said.

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Career Center Implements a NO-ZERO Grading Policy That Works

Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center in rural Ashland, Ohio, serves 324 students from five high schools enrolled in 16 junior/senior programs and one sophomore program. Ninety-seven percent are white; 54 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Almost one-third of students are in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

“To raise achievement and prepare students for the real world after graduation, the center implemented its own version of a no-zero grading policy,” said Assistant Principal **John Davis**. “The policy was adjusted and evolved each year until we discovered what did and did not work for our school.”

School leaders and teachers were inspired by presentations made at the 2009 *HSTW* Staff Development Conference. They also studied the book, *The Power of ICU*, and welcomed visits from Toni Eubank of the SREB staff in spring and fall 2010. “Gaining the school board’s approval was fundamental to ensuring staff buy-in,” Davis said. “It also encouraged us as we implemented a system to benefit students.”

The first no-zero grading policy involved removing struggling students from career/technical classes and placing them with a tutor. “The idea was that the students would complete the missing assignments more quickly in order to get back to the career/tech classes they enjoyed,” Davis said. “However, the career/tech teachers objected on the grounds that their classes were as important as academic classes, and we never meant to imply otherwise.”

A new plan known as “Lunch Bunch” was implemented in 2011. When a student misses an assignment, he or she signs a Lunch Bunch form and the teacher notifies the parents. Lunch Bunch is a 30-minute study session during lunch period. Originally scheduled for five days a week, the session was scaled back in 2012 to Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The procedure for the no-zero policy is straightforward:

- All students will satisfactorily (at a level of 70 percent or above) complete all graded assignments.
- Students who fail to do so will fail that grading period BY CHOICE.

Students receive a two-week grace period to complete their assignments after the grading period. Missing assignments are marked “I” for Incomplete on progress reports. If a student still does not complete the work, he or she receives a failing grade. “A student fails by choice rather than lack of opportunity,” Davis said.

Student achievement has improved since 2008-2009. “There has been a significant reduction in students missing assignments,” Davis said. Also, the graduation rate at the center rose from 86 percent in 2009 to 98 percent in both 2010 and 2011.

The career center hopes for continued board support as it moves forward with Lunch Bunch in 2012-2013. “We also hope to implement a new Thursday School program to assist students with overdue assignments,” Davis said. “We will continue to collect data on the grading policy and make adjustments as needed.”

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Making It Easier and More Consistent to Grade Science Lab Reports

Two science teachers at Seneca High School (SHS), an *HSTW* site in rural Oconee County, South Carolina, conducted research before taking steps to equalize grading practices among their colleagues. **Chris White** and **Ashley Perry** are satisfied that “the grade no longer changes based upon the grader.”

SHS is a school that strives to uphold high standards. The dropout rate is low (3.6 percent) while the attendance rate is high (94.3 percent). More than one-third of students take at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course. Seventy-seven percent of graduates enter college. The school was named in 2012 as one of the top 100 high-implementation *HSTW* sites.

SHS science department teachers conduct at least one formal lab every nine weeks, and students write formal reports on the labs. White and Perry discovered that there was little consistency among teachers in terms of how the lab reports were graded.

Various Sources of Rubrics

“Most of us were using rubrics, but each of us was using his or her own version,” White said. The rubrics came from various sources, such as a colleague, a college professor or the Internet. “Even when the same rubric was applied to lab reports, the grades varied, depending on the grader.”

The SHS science faculty’s first solution was to adopt a common rubric that had been developed at Clemson University. The use of this rubric brought mixed results. “All the students were now being exposed to the same rubric and the expectations for what they were supposed to do were much clearer,” Perry said. “But the rubric was very cumbersome and didn’t resolve the differences in how teachers applied it when grading the lab reports.”

As White and Perry began to research rubrics more thoroughly, they learned that the analytic-type rubric the department had been using was not the only option for providing feedback and scoring students’ work. Analytic rubrics establish criteria for competencies in several areas, such as content, organization, format and language use. The areas are scored individually.

The Right Answer

Holistic rubrics proved to be the right solution. “Holistic rubrics identify all the criteria that represent competency on a single scale,” Perry said. “The raters can use one rating to give an overall score instead of adding up points in several different categories. The process saved time and increased inter-rater reliability.”

In developing a holistic rubric for the SHS science department, White and Perry took the expectations from the old analytic rubric. They met with their colleagues, resolved any issues and reached consensus before adopting the new format.

Initially, department members had four group grading sessions to help them internalize the criteria for levels of competency on the new scale. Periodically, they met to re-establish their common expectations for student performance and to train new faculty members.

“Grading lab reports can be the bane of a science teacher’s existence, because it is a cumbersome process,” White said. “Using this holistic rubric makes the process more efficient and makes us more consistent while maintaining high expectations. It’s a win for students and teachers.”

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Pacesetter Technology Centers Use *TCTW* Key Practices and Conditions to Revitalize and Improve Effectiveness in Preparing Students for Careers and Further Study



Technology Center Shares the Keys to Higher School and Student Achievement

National Park Technology Center (NPTC) in Hot Springs, Arkansas, received the *Technology Centers That Work* (TCTW) Platinum High Achievement Award from SREB in 2012. This recognition is given to technology centers that exemplify the progress centers can make when leaders embrace change and deeply implement the *TCTW* Key Practices for school improvement. Centers receiving the award provide a rigorous curriculum linked to a program of study resulting in higher student achievement.

NPTC is on the campus of National Park Community College (NPCC). “We have identified six characteristics that set us apart from other schools,” said Assistant Director **Jason Hudnell**. “The characteristics are recruiting; relationships with area schools, academics, community and school service; teacher success teams; and professional development.”

Recruiting is a big priority at NPTC. “Every staff member is involved in recruiting parents, teachers, counselors, administrators and community members,” Hudnell said. Leaders and teachers at area high schools know the NPTC staff by face and name. Twelve years ago, NPTC had 120 students. Today, close to 600 juniors and seniors from eight area high schools are enrolled at the center.

Many students take five Advanced Placement (AP) courses at their home schools before entering the technology center. “This enrollment of AP students reflects the value and rigor of our programs,” Hudnell said. “Counselors and administrators at the high schools encourage honor students to take courses at NPTC because they see what happens when students are involved in career/tech programs that have high expectations with math and literacy in the forefront.”

Seven Program Areas

In the realm of academics, students at NPTC choose classes in seven program areas: automotive, advertising and graphic design, cabinet making, criminal justice, internship, machining, and medical professions. Students have access to nationally recognized certifications and concurrent credit.

“Each program requires students to take classes that emphasize literacy and math, do a minimum of five hours of homework weekly and engage in online learning,” said Director **David Hughes**. Students solve practical problems involving mathematics in the technical classrooms. Mathematics projects range from calculating medicine dosages to the effect of tire size and air pressure on gas mileage. Students read technical manuals and trade magazines as part of their experiences at the center.

NPTC instructors have received professional development in teaching strategies and *TCTW* best practices and are involved in the Literacy Design Collaborative through SREB. They use a variety of strategies to support literacy, including the Frayer reading model, peer-to-peer reading, focused free writes and word walls.

Work Ethics

Students participate in CHAMPIONS, an online work ethics program, as well as a bridge program designed to help students move successfully from high school to college. The iLead program offers leadership opportunities and peer learning. Seven students from each class (140 students) participate in sessions that focus on applying for a job and exhibiting the personal characteristics of a good employee. After students complete the sessions, they share experiences with classmates in their programs.

NPTC requires each program to perform an annual community service project. One outstanding activity is the food and dry goods drive conducted for Samaritan Ministries by students in the medical professions program to assist the area homeless. “Our students have been so successful with this project over the years that the charity routinely includes it in their annual events,” Hughes said.

In another example, students in the cabinetmaking program build specialty wooden chairs for children born prematurely at the Arkansas Children’s Hospital. The chairs are designed to help train and strengthen spinal muscles so that the youngsters can sit upright.

School Service

All students participate in school service each year. One example is a beautification project on the community college campus. Students weed, prune, plant flowers and shrubbery, paint, and maintain lights.

Teachers are members of success teams that allow them to voice their opinions and contribute to positive changes at the center.

Coaching Technical Teachers to Be Mainstream Educators in Embedding State Standards

Technical teachers can experience a “stepchild syndrome” if academic educators fail to see them as equals. Successful schools are developing ways to bring academic and technical teachers closer together as mainstream educators to embed state standards into the curriculum.

Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center (SCCTC) in Dimock, Pennsylvania, has created professional learning communities (PLCs) and is offering professional development for all teachers — academic and technical. In effect since 2010-2011, the professional development is designed to help technical teachers (some of whom lack formal degrees) to join academic teachers in discussing curriculum, instruction and assessment.

The SCCTC enrolls 420 high school students from seven area schools. Students have access to 13 programs of study.

The four teams focus on recruiting, professional development, awards and handbook/public relations.

Instructors are encouraged to seek professional development opportunities and to fill leadership roles in their professional organizations. They also present “best practices” at state, regional and national conferences such as the annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference. “Our instructors are our most important resource,” Hudnell said. “You can have the best equipment in the world, but it won’t matter if you don’t have good teachers.”

High-Tech Equipment

NPTC prides itself on having state-of-the-art equipment for its career/technical (CT) programs. The criminal justice program has a 911 dispatch call center for students to prepare for national certification. This program also houses a Laser Shot system, a simulated crime scenario program that allows students to train with simulated rifles and pistols. “The program is owned by NPTC and is actually used by local and regional law enforcement officers for training on our campus,” Hudnell said. The machine tool technology program houses a computerized laser engraver that requires students to know basic algebra and geometry to program the designs into the machine for a successful engraving project.

The actions of NPTC’s leaders and teachers are a success. Two-thirds of NPTC completers attend college at NPCC. Less than 40 percent are required to take remedial courses.

NPTC has been recognized by SREB for the third consecutive year as a national leader in CT education. In addition to the *TCTW* Platinum High Achievement Award in 2012, the school received the *TCTW* Gold Readiness Award in 2011 and the Outstanding *TCTW* Technology Center Award in 2010.

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New Teachers Benefit

“Our professional development also benefits technical teachers who are new to the teaching field by offering information on preparing lesson plans, working with students, understanding teaching methods and collaborating with other teachers,” said **Alice Davis**, executive director of the SCCTC. Professional development makes it possible for career/technical (CT) teachers to become aware of and speak the language of both academic and CT disciplines.

Teachers meet every Wednesday afternoon for one hour. These meetings have four specific purposes:

- Revise the technical curriculum to include academic standards.
- Increase teachers’ knowledge of literacy and mathematics instructional strategies.
- Strengthen assessment practices.
- Empower teachers to develop peer-led PLCs.

Leaders at the SCCTC have helped all teachers to base curriculum and instruction on the vision of assessment according to certain principles:

- Assessment should be a daily process focusing on standards expectations.
- Quality assessment requires a daily focus on improving learning skills and showing that students have learned the content.
- A curriculum map is just a piece of paper unless teachers use it.
- All teachers need to teach reading.
- Mathematics requires teachers to share information and know common terminology.
- Teachers must require writing on a regular, sustained basis. The SCCTC staff has changed from correcting students’ writing to using writing to increase literacy and subject knowledge.
- Common Core State Standards or other rigorous standards are essential for all teachers.

SCCTC teachers attend weekly PLC meetings that focus on instructional or assessment techniques. Davis is joined in co-teaching by **Dan Perna**, president of James Daniel and Associates, LLC, in Shamokin Dam, Pennsylvania. Perna serves as an instructional coach at SCCTC and works closely with new instructors to create lesson plans through the Guides4Learning System. “The heavy emphasis during the past two years has been on how to use engaged learning strategies to involve 100 percent of students in the learning process,” Perna said. “The school has developed assessment rubrics for all teacher-guided assessments within the school. By combining instructional strategies with criteria-driven assessments, the teachers have begun to see how all instruction and curriculum are driven by assessment expectations.”

Davis said teachers in the PLCs learn instructional strategies to continue integration of mathematics and literacy into all program areas. “We also form focus and task groups for various projects throughout the school year,” she said.

Teachers use an ALERT form to monitor student progress and to increase the chances of student success. Teachers complete an ALERT form weekly if a student scores below 74 percent. The form includes a current grade and a reason for the grade. Each teacher develops a plan of action with support staff and students and notifies administrators and a guidance counselor what needs to be done to raise student achievement.

Since the technology center began making changes, SCCTC students have made significant progress on the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) written assessment. The percentage of students scoring Proficient or above on the assessment rose from 51.2 percent in 2007-2008 to 98 percent in 2011-2012.

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Technology Center Completes the Journey to Become a Technical High School

“What can we do to become an ideal school?”

This question motivated **Mercer County Technical Education Center** (MCTEC) in Princeton, West Virginia, to make the transition from a technology center to a technical high school.

“School leaders recognized that students from the four sending schools needed to spend more time at the center and less time on the bus,” said **Amanda Aliff**, retention facilitator at MCTEC. “The time students spent in transit was preventing them from earning the credits they needed to graduate and to complete a career/technical (CT) concentration. The result was that the center was struggling with program retention and completion rates.”

With the leadership of the *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* team and support from SREB school improvement coordinator **Peggy Graham**, the center began the transition in 2009-2010 by targeting five improvement areas: quality CT courses, guidance, postsecondary transition, curriculum alignment and data use. The center received a *TCTW* Gold Readiness Award from SREB in 2012 for its improvement efforts.

New Mission Statement

As the staff began the transformation from technical center to technical high school, they saw the need to develop a team culture with a common goal. They also realized that the seldom-used school mission statement needed to be changed. With district support and stipends for regular after-school meeting time, the faculty developed a new mission: *To prepare students to excel in the 21st-century, information-based, technologically advanced global society.*

“One of the first steps in addressing the new mission was to develop quality courses,” said Director **Linda Cox**. Course descriptions indicate the quality of courses. For example, students entering electricity technology must read at or above the grade 10 level. Successful graduates receive a certification qualifying them to take the state journeyman electrician test.

MCTEC provided professional development for industry professionals who joined the faculty, and every teacher contributed to making the curriculum more challenging. New teachers worked with mentors, and school administrators conducted frequent classroom walkthroughs to support higher standards in curriculum and instruction.

Higher-Quality Learning

Many other actions were taken to increase the quality of learning:

- MCTEC hired two new academic coaches and a technology integration specialist.
- All teachers started class with a bell ringer suggested by the academic coaches.



“We experienced a 32 percent increase in enrollment between 2010 and 2012. Twenty-eight percent of MCTEC students who took the *High Schools That Work* Assessment received national academic achievement awards.”

Amanda Aliff, Mercer County Technical Education Center

- Teachers kept notebooks of writing to reinforce the fact that writing across the curriculum is important.
- All teachers used the West Virginia Writes engine that grades writing initiated by writing prompts.
- All students did WorkKeys homework each night.
- MCTEC offered English 12 classes on campus, enabling students to earn dual credit from a local college.
- The center upgraded technology to include SMART Boards, laptop labs and other equipment.

Teacher teams developed a guidance plan with two goals: 1) to market the school to students and the community and 2) to develop an adviser/advisee program. The marketing plan consisted of a number of activities:

- MCTEC counselors visited all four feeder high schools to update counselors on course offerings and the school culture at the center.
- High school counselors visited the center.
- Freshmen and sophomores from sending schools visited the center to hear presentations by MCTEC teachers.
- The center hosted a breakfast for business partners, an expo to strengthen bonds with the business community and a summer academy to keep students up-to-standards academically.
- MCTEC conducted a survey among business leaders to determine the needs of the business community.
- The center featured former students in weekly features on the front page of the local newspaper.

The major purpose of the MCTEC adviser/advisee program was to develop relationships with students. Advisers achieved this aim by establishing frequent contact with parents and holding personal conversations with students. A second purpose of the program was to raise awareness of MCTEC's programs and how to complete a program. During advisory meetings, advisers conducted individual transcript reviews to make students aware of course offerings and what it would take to be a completer. The sports marketing class conducted a survey showing that 90 percent of students knew the requirements to complete a program.

Earning Credits

Postsecondary transition was a contributing factor in MCTEC's move from tech center to technical high school. With the help of an Innovation Zone (IZ) grant, MCTEC developed course work allowing students to earn CT credits while receiving partial or full academic credits. The IZ grant provided a waiver for seat time, enabling students to earn four credits in a career concentration while completing all academic requirements for graduation. In addition, students could earn credit for a technology project, work-based learning experiences and internships coordinated by the county's career connections office. Articulation agreements and on-site classes from New River Community and Technical College provided opportunities for students to earn dual enrollment credits.

To ensure curriculum alignment and to help students see the relevance between academic and CT content, MCTEC teachers did embedded credit crosswalks to identify common standards among classes. The crosswalks led to opportunities for students to earn dual credit, complete a

CT program and graduate on time. Teachers also completed syllabus development training with industry professionals. Students took formative assessments in preparation for summative assessments.

Has MCTEC become an ideal school? Data indicate that the school is on the right track. "We experienced a 32 percent increase in enrollment between 2010 and 2012," said Aliff. "Twenty-eight percent of MCTEC students who took the *High Schools That Work* Assessment received national academic achievement awards."

MCTEC is a 100 percent Skills USA chapter. Students received 16 medals at the West Virginia Skills USA competition in 2012. Eighty percent of students taking the Global 21 Performance Assessment in 2010-2011 received certificates. The number rose to 95 percent in 2011-2012.

The WorkKeys assessment, which is administered by ACT, measures job skills to ensure that students are ready for life and the workplace. A total of 137 MCTEC students received WorkKeys certificates in 2009-2010. The number increased to 275 students in 2011-2012.

"The transition to a technical high school brought unexpected changes," Aliff said. "Student engagement increased along with the student population. Students participated in more project-based learning, internships and work projects. The school developed a climate of high expectations, making it an ideal place for students."

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Successful Transition Programs Allow Students to Follow a Smooth Graduation Path

Sink or Swim: Student Mentors Serve as Life Preservers for Incoming Freshmen

The Sink or Swim program at **Mary G. Montgomery High School** (MGMHS) in Semmes, Alabama, serves two purposes: to help incoming freshmen make the transition from the middle grades to high school and to develop leadership qualities in upperclassmen.

Students entering grades 10, 11 and 12 in the fall apply to be "lifeguards" in a summer bridge transitional program. The selection of students to be mentors in the program is based on grade point average (GPA), a good discipline record, teacher references and school awareness. Parents must give their permission for students to participate. "Lifeguards should possess leadership ability, integrity, a good attitude and a good work ethic," said **Allison Miller**, leadership teacher and director of the program.



Lifeguard responsibilities include 1) small group leadership; 2) photography and videography; 3) food and prizes; and 4) activities and entertainment. They attend meetings and training sessions before the two-day event and are on hand to assist freshmen on the first day of school in the fall. Some 50 students participate as lifeguards each year. “The largest number of lifeguard applicants each year consists of students who participated in the program as ‘swimmers’ in the ninth grade,” Miller said.

Incoming freshmen are called swimmers and are recruited in April and May. The recruitment strategies include a brochure, a website and visits to feeder middle grades schools. Since the program began in 2003, it has averaged 160 to 200 freshmen per year.

The two-day event is filled with information such as High School 101 and includes a campus tour, individual and team competitions, and a pep rally. The intent is to buoy new students’ confidence about high school academics and other expectations while enhancing the leadership qualities of upperclassmen.

“Our school graduated 409 students in 2012, the first time we have had more than 400 graduates,” Miller said. “We attribute a lot of that success to helping students get a good start in freshman year.”

MGMHS received an *HSTW* Gold Achievement Award in 2012. It has also been named one of the top 80 most-improved *HSTW* schools and one of the top 100 high-implementation *HSTW* schools.

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This newsletter of “best practices” in implementing the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)*, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* school improvement models is based on presentations at the 26th Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, in summer 2012.

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