Effective School Leaders Engage Teachers and Teacher-Leaders in Owning and Solving School Problems

SREB

Effective school leaders create a culture of continuous improvement in which teachers examine students' work and determine how to help students meet higher standards. Principals at successful schools are instructional leaders who listen to what teachers need in professional development and for implementation of proven practices. Principals and teacher-leaders at successful schools work together to raise student achievement.

Analyze Students' Work and Assessments to Ensure More Students Meet or Exceed Grade-Level Standards

Involving Leaders, Teachers and Students in Success

Student achievement at **Eddy Middle School** (EMS) in Columbus, Georgia, has risen steadily due to targeted interventions. School leaders have worked with teachers to implement professional learning communities (PLCs), student interventions, professional development, vertical planning with feeder schools and Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) activities.

EMS is a Title I school enrolling 373 students. It is also a *Making Middle Grades Work* (*MMGW*) site. The ethnic distribution is 83 percent black, 8 percent white, 5 percent multiracial and 4 percent Hispanic. Eighty-eight percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

- **PLCs** — Teachers meet weekly to analyze student work, develop unit plans and review results of classroom focus walks to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses. The focus walks are conducted by the school leadership team, SREB consultants, Georgia Department of Education specialists and district staff members. The school improvement specialist facilitates the weekly meetings. "Teachers get fresh ideas and are able to share successful strategies with others," said **Sureya Hendrick**, academic coach at EMS.

- **Student Interventions** — Teachers analyze assessment data to group students by deficiencies or needs. The students are placed in classes with strong teachers who will address those needs. Students meet with their teachers during the school's increased learning time.

Struggling students receive targeted instruction after school and on Saturdays. School improvement specialists meet with individual students after major exams to discuss current performance and future exam targets.

- **Professional Development** — School leaders build teacher capacity by providing job-embedded professional development. Recent topics have included rigor in instruction; vocabulary integration within the instructional framework; and the Universal Design for Learning, a framework for developing flexible learning environments to accommodate individual learning differences. Teachers are asked to integrate what they learn into classroom instruction and to share lesson plans and student work at the next session. These examples, along with findings from follow-up administrative focus walks, serve as evidence of the effectiveness of professional development.

"I am amazed when teachers reflect on teaching practices and student work and then collaborate to help each other evaluate the quality and rigor of a task and assist in moving a task from one level of depth of knowledge to another," Hendrick said.

- **Vertical Planning** — Leaders have opened lines of communication with feeder schools (three elementary schools and one high school). School leaders and teachers discuss how to work together to improve transitions and raise student achievement.

- **LDC Activities** —
  The school is focusing on how to incorporate reading and writing into all core subjects. The LDC framework is the basis of tasks, modules and courses to raise students' literacy skills in conjunction with rigorous course content.

Students at Eddy Middle School improved in reading and mathematics on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) between 2009 and 2012.

Percentages of Eddy Middle School Students Meeting Standards on Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)

Content Area and Grade Level	2009	2012
Math — Grade 6	49.6%	68%
Math — Grade 7	54.4	80.8
Math — Grade 8	50	55
Reading — Grade 6	68.8	85.3
Reading — Grade 7	76.8	84
Reading — Grade 8	83.8	89.1

"SREB consultants have played an important role in the development of many programs and tasks we have put into place to maximize planning and the quality of instruction provided to students," Hendrick said. "They consistently provide us with tools to help our teachers become better educators. We still have a long way to go, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel thanks to support and guidance from SREB consultants and our Georgia Department of Education improvement specialist."

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Teacher Teaming at the Middle Grades Level

Baxter Junior High School in Everman, Texas, enrolls 786 students in grades seven and eight. The student demographics are 51 percent black, 43 percent Hispanic, 5 percent white and 1 percent other ethnicities.

Beginning in 2011, school leaders organized teachers into interdisciplinary teams that meet in common planning periods to focus on specific groups of students. Each team is composed of five to seven teachers representing English/language arts (ELA), reading, mathematics, science, social studies, special education and English as a Second Language (ESL).

The school's A/B block schedule consists of four 80-minute periods plus a 40-minute advisory period each day. On "A" days, each interdisciplinary team has a common planning period. On "B" days, teachers meet in a common planning period by department or same subject area content.

"The interdisciplinary team structure allows teachers to pool their resources, interests, experiences and student knowledge to assume joint responsibility for meeting some of the instructional, social and emotional needs of the same group of students," said Principal **Felicia Donaldson**.

Common Planning Time

During common planning time, teachers coordinate lesson plans across subject areas as well as schedule assessments and due dates for major projects. They also focus on individual students, particularly those at risk, to design a common set of rules for classroom behavior and assignments. "Teachers make connections in their subject areas," said SREB/*MMGW* school improvement consultant **Alan Veach**, who has worked with school leaders in making changes. "This creates relevancy between subjects."

"Group discussions about students have led to faster, better and more consistent disciplinary actions," Donaldson said. As a result, BJHS had a 36 percentage-point decrease in discipline referrals from 2010 to 2012. "Teachers discuss individual needs of students in terms of behavior or academic achievement and are able to develop an intervention plan for each student," Veach said.

School leaders decided on four objectives for the first year of teacher teaming in 2010-2011:

- Achieve success by ensuring that each team becomes a cohesive unit. Bring teachers from different subject areas together to change the way they conduct daily tasks.

- Establish consistent norms and expectations and common classroom procedures for handling arrival, discipline and instructional issues.

- Increase the success rate of all students through teacher collaboration, student-team conferences and parent-team conferences. The conferences take place during common planning time.

- Incorporate interdisciplinary instruction by developing lessons that cross over two, three or even four subject areas. Connect learning across disciplines.

Departmental Planning

Interdisciplinary teaming did not eliminate departmental planning at BJHS. On "B" days, core teachers share a common planning period by subject area. This schedule has allowed teachers to develop common unit outlines, daily lesson plans and common assessments. Teachers also utilize this time to analyze student assignments to ensure a high level of rigor. "Teachers work together to ensure that assignments and assessments reach the Proficient level," Veach said.

BJHS implemented a redo/revise policy and a "no zeros" policy. The daily advisory period is used for students to be retaught and reassessed on content they did not master in the classroom. The goal is for each student to reach 80 percent mastery on all work. Since no zeros are given, students use the advisory period to complete work for a higher grade.

"Team empowerment is a major reason for the success of interdisciplinary teaming," Donaldson said. "When teams of teachers are given the authority to do what is best for students, they feel they are in control and do what is needed to raise student achievement."

"When teams of teachers are given the authority to do what is best for students, they feel they are in control and do what is needed to raise student achievement."

Felicia Donaldson, Baxter Junior High School

Many Positive Changes

Camaraderie among teachers has increased as a result of interdisciplinary and content-area planning time. Teachers have become more adept at instruction as they share and learn from each other.

"Teacher teaming touches all aspects of school culture, rigor and relevance, assessment results, teacher retention, student promotion, curriculum alignment, collaboration, attendance, emotional climate, and community confidence," Donaldson said. He noted basic data showing increased teacher experience, higher student attendance, fewer dropouts and increased learning opportunities despite serving an increasingly economically disadvantaged community.

"Parent support and communication have flourished, bringing a higher level of engagement and a greater sense of community among students," Donaldson continued. "A parent-teacher organization has become highly active as changes have been made at school."

On the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), Baxter Junior High School eighth-graders had a 10-point gain on the eighth-grade reading assessment (from 67 percent passing in 2012 to 77 percent passing in 2013) and a two-point gain on the eighth-grade math assessment (from 67 percent in 2012 to 69 percent in 2013). This group of students had a 58 percent passing rate on the seventh-grade math assessment and an 11-point gain in the passing rate in math.

The 2012 *MMGW* Teacher Survey showed that the percentages of BJHS teachers exceeded the percentages of teachers at all *MMGW* sites in a number of key areas:

■ Ninety-five percent of BJHS teachers, compared with 86 percent at all sites, say teachers require students to redo or revise assignments when student work does not meet standards.

■ One hundred percent of BJHS mathematics teachers require students to orally defend the process used to solve a math problem at least monthly. They require students to work with other students on a challenging math assignment and receive an individual or a group grade at least monthly, and review student work and provide feedback rather than telling students what to do. The percentages for teachers using these strategies at all sites totaled 80 percent, 61 percent and 85 percent respectively.

■ Sixty-nine percent of ELA teachers at BJHS require students to read several pieces on the same topic and discuss the different points of view at least monthly. This finding compares with 55 percent at all sites.

■ Fifty-nine percent of BJHS science teachers strongly agreed that science instruction has the same level of importance as reading and math at their school. This compared with 37 percent of science teachers at all *MMGW* sites.

■ Seventy percent of BJHS teachers said in their roles as advisers to small groups of students that they inform parents and students about students' readiness to undertake challenging high school studies at least once or twice a semester, compared with 57 percent at all *MMGW* sites.

■ Eighty-five percent of BJHS teachers, compared with 70 percent at all *MMGW* sites, said they provide extra help and time during the school day for every student performing below grade level.

■ Eighty-five percent of BJHS teachers, compared with 73 percent at all *MMGW* sites, reported that they meet with other teachers in the department, team or school to analyze standards and create assignments that engage students in deeper learning at least monthly.

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Standards-Based Grading: What One School Learned From Implementation

Principal **Richard Callahan** and the leadership team at **Spring Hill High School** (SHHS) in Columbia, Tennessee, continue to see the benefits of moving to standards-based grading. The results have been positive, particularly with students who traditionally perform at a lower level.

SHHS enrolls 870 students, including 74 percent white, 18 percent black, 7 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Thirty-three percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 16 percent are disabled.

The shift to a new grading strategy originated in 2010 when Callahan and members of the leadership team attended a session on standards-based grading at the *High Schools That Work* Staff Development Conference. Back at school, they did research showing that grades and ACT scores did not always correlate. They also found that many grades being assigned by teachers each period failed to reflect students' mastery of state standards.

Expectations

At the beginning of 2010-2011, Callahan and the leadership team presented information on standards-based grading to the faculty and set expectations for teachers to use the approach. "We realized that some departments would find it easier to do than others," Callahan said.

Here is how it works: Assessments are divided into standards or skills necessary to meet state standards. Each standard/skill is assigned points. Students must pass standards within units or they will not pass the course. Teachers remediate and retest until students master the standards.

Students behind in their studies or on the verge of failing attend remediation sessions for 30 minutes each school day. Students receive tutoring, complete makeup work, retake exams, recover credits and participate in other activities to advance learning.

Teachers put grades in pencil and circle them in their grade books. Grades are posted online and change continously as students retake and pass portions of exams. They remain in pencil until all standards are passed.

"Standards-based grading has had a ripple effect on the staff at Spring Hill High School," said **Steve Hagen**, an *HSTW* school improvement consultant who has provided recent coaching to the school. "The math department began implementing standards-based grading with positive results. The commitment to this grading method by parents, students and other teachers happened after they saw higher algebra end-of-course assessment scores. The career/technical, English, science and social studies departments are now implementing the approach."

Some Strategies

Strategies that academic and career/technical teachers have used in embracing standards-based grading include the following:

- **Teachers in the math department no longer grade homework. Students who fail to do homework twice in a row are referred to remediation to complete the work. Math teachers agree that not doing homework is a behavior issue instead of a grade issue. Grades are based totally on assessments.**

- **Science** teachers revamped their instruction, adding more labs and vocabulary strategies such as paper foldables, a hands-on way to learn concepts.

- An **English** teacher credits standards-based grading with allowing her to pinpoint more specifically where students need mastery or improvement. **For example, the standards in English IV include writing, research, language and literature.** In the past, she only knew that a student needed to work on a summative assessment or a daily assignment.

- **Career/technical** teachers moved readily to standards-based grading because they were accustomed to scoring students on attainment of standards and competencies. A marketing instructor said standards-based grading helped him develop and set up student portfolios.

The benefits of standards-based grading have been especially noticeable for students in IEPs (Individualized Education Programs). SHHS began using the inclusion model with special-education students in regular English and math classes. The problems or directions may be different for IEP students, but the concepts are the same for all students. **Standards-based grading has made it possible to pinpoint specific deficiencies among IEP students.**

Results

"Average grades for all students were lower during the first year of standards-based grading because homework, notebooks and extra credit had inflated students' grades in the past," Callahan said. "However, the difference between grades and state assessments has decreased."

The percentages of students scoring Proficient/Advanced exceeded the Tennessee rates by 19 percentage points in Algebra I and six percentage points in English II in 2012.

The graduation rate at SHHS rose from 81.8 percent in 2009 to 86.5 percent in 2010. It increased to 88.3 percent in 2011 and to 91.6 percent in 2012. Black students led the way with a graduation rate of 92.7 percent in 2012. The SHHS graduation rate exceeded the Tennessee graduation rate by 4.5 points in 2012.

"Test scores provide documentation of the effectiveness of standards-based grading," Hagen said. "Minority students are scoring higher than white students, and economically disadvantaged students are scoring higher than those not economically disadvantaged on math end-of-course assessments. More students with IEPs are meeting state standards in math than in previous years. This is a testimony to the impact of standards-based grading when properly implemented."

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Building a Data Culture by Creating Data Walls and Data Walks

Schools in the *HSTW* Northeast Ohio Region are developing ways to engage teachers, students and others in paying attention to data as a tool for school improvement. Leaders at these schools understand the importance of data and the need for education in the use of data. To accomplish this task, they are focusing on techniques such as data walls and data walks.

Data presentations that are too technical will not work; they should be teacher friendly. **Data presentations are important; they replace "hunches" with facts and assist viewers in understanding the relationship of school and classroom practices to student achievement.**

Schools wanting to build a data culture should ask three key questions:

- Do we have a functioning data team?
- Does the faculty take ownership of the data?
- Do we receive data and use it in meaningful ways?

A data wall is a strategy in which a faculty member prepares a poster of relevant data to hang on the wall. Posters may contain data on student achievement from the *HSTW* Assessments, state assessments, or student opinions of school and classroom practices from the *HSTW* Assessment and *MMGW* survey.

Data walls serve many functions. They:

- tell a story about the school;
- provide a common context for faculty discussions about data;
- refocus improvement efforts for better results;
- serve as a constant reminder of progress made and work to be done;
- inform principals, staff members and others;
- invite discussion and further inquiry;
- create a need for careful selection of data in terms of importance and appropriateness;
- facilitate analysis for continued improvement; and
- promote competition for higher achievement.

The location of a data wall depends on the type and purpose of the data and the intended audience. Confidential data should be kept in a faculty meeting room. Other data may be placed in the school lobby. Someone should be designated to keep data walls current. Everyone should be concerned about keeping data as a regular agenda item for school meetings and ensuring that data is an integral part of school improvement efforts.

"Data walls are a quick and easy way to provide data to our staff, students and the public without giving them pieces of paper and expecting them to figure it out on their own."

Jack Tomasko, Southern Regional Education Board

Another strategy is to engage faculty in viewing the data in a systematic way. "Data walks are a great way to involve numbers of staff members," said **Jack Tomasko**, *HSTW/MMGW* coach in the Northeast Ohio Region. A facilitator directs a group of staff members to data posters. During the data walk, teams rotate to look at the poster data, read a provided question based on the poster, and then discuss the question and potential answers. Team members add comments, observations and information to the poster. The information builds as more teams rotate and analyze the poster data.

Brenda Svec is the *MMGW* site co-coordinator at **Sheffield Middle School** in Sheffield, Ohio. The school enrolls approximately 450 students. **"Data walls are a quick and easy way to provide data to our staff, students and the public without giving them pieces of paper and expecting them to figure it out on their own," Svec said.**

Her school has had success with placing grades six through eight vertically and placing reading, mathematics and science horizontally on a data display. "We use this method to track the percentages of students passing the three subjects," Svec said.

Cynthia Hanish was a former principal in the **Cleveland Metropolitan School District** in Cleveland, Ohio. She noticed that the data wall at her school was working when teachers began talking with students about the data. "Teachers meet with every student to review the data and to set goals," Hanish said. **"Students appreciate the personal attention and say they find the individual conferences very valuable. I have heard students discussing their goals and taking pride in their schoolwork."**

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Putting the *HSTW/MMGW* Improvement Framework to Work in Elementary Schools

The **Hoke County School District** in Raeford, North Carolina, continues to implement a vertical articulation project to align curricula and instruction to standards at all grade levels across the district, including pre-K. The project began in 2009-2010, first at **Hoke County High School** and then at the middle grades schools. It moved to the elementary grades in 2011-2012.

Elementary academic coaches and all fifth-grade English, mathematics, science and social studies teachers worked with SREB consultants and middle grades instructional facilitators to study vertical articulation in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the North Carolina Essential Standards. They also collaborated to identify, locate and create instructional activities and resources to promote higher student achievement and to help fifth-graders make a smooth transition into the middle grades.

During 2012-2013, the vertical articulation project includes implementing the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) at all grade levels throughout the district. Teachers and administrators are working with SREB consultants to create LDC modules and tasks to meet the goals of the CCSS. The district will move toward implementing the Mathematics Design Collaborative modules in 2013-2014.

Resource Materials

Content specialists have used a number of resources in working with Hoke County leaders and teachers. The resources include SREB college-readiness guides and other publications, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction CCSS support tools, district curriculum alignment documents, and other materials such as the revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The specialists used instructional technology resources such as LiveBinders, virtual three-ring binders; Wikispaces, a free web hosting tool; and Drop Box for storing individual folders.

"Vertical articulation and Literacy Design Collaborative meetings between and across grade levels have resulted in common vocabulary and instructional practices and a shared vision for excellence throughout the district," said **Donna Thomas**, executive director of elementary education for Hoke County schools. **"The work we have been doing with SREB consultants, vertical articulation, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and the Literacy Design Collaborative has better-prepared our teachers and students to meet the expectations of the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced Assessments."**

Achievement Gains

Since the articulation project began, Hoke County High School has seen increases in the graduation rate from 69.8 percent in 2009-2010, to 71.7 percent in 2010-2011, and to 75.3 percent in 2011-2012.

East Hoke Middle School (EHMS) realized gains in reading and mathematics on the North Carolina ABC accountability program's end-of-grade assessments. The reading score rose from 67.5 percent Proficient in 2008-2009, to 72.6 percent in 2010-2011, and 73.9 percent in 2011-2012. **The math score climbed from 74.4 percent Proficient in 2008-2009 to 88.8 percent in 2010-2011; it was 88.5 percent in 2011-2012. EHMS was named a North Carolina School of Distinction in 2010-2011 for having 80 to 90 percent of students performing at grade level.**

The end-of-grade reading score at **West Hoke Middle School** (WHMS) increased from 47.4 percent Proficient in 2008-2009 to 58.7 percent in 2010-2011; it was 56.5 percent in 2011-2012. **The end-of-grade math score improved from 62.1 percent Proficient in 2008-2009 to 80.2 percent in 2010-2011; it was 78 percent in 2011-2012. WHMS was named a North Carolina School of Progress in 2009-2010 for having 60 percent to 80 percent of students performing at grade level.**

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Effective Planning Can Produce Highly Qualified School Leaders

Communicating the Need for Educational Leadership and Implementing a Plan to Develop School Leaders

Principal **Marlon Firle** of **B. C. Rain High School** in Mobile, Alabama, emphasized the importance of developing educational leaders within the school. **He listed actions essential for creating a "school where everybody works:"**

- **Educate individuals and groups about the importance of leadership.**
- **Ensure that leaders receive support.**
- **Involve everyone. Give everyone something to do.**
- **Place teachers and other staff members in their areas of strength.**
- **Give each member a title, i.e., events coordinator.**
- **Promote ownership of students: our students rather than those students.**
- **Strengthen relationships with teachers. Know their personal and family backgrounds.**
- **Listen to staff members. Pay attention to what they need or suggest.**
- **Be consistent. Tell everyone the same thing.**
- **Base every decision on the welfare of students.**

"Teachers in a successful school must engage students intellectually, socially, emotionally and behaviorally."

Marlon Firle, B. C. Rain High School

"Teachers in a successful school must engage students intellectually, socially, emotionally and behaviorally," Firle said. "We found that teachers were teaching, but students were not learning. End-of-course assessments were the wake-up call to involve every teacher in a leadership role in raising student achievement."

The action plan focused heavily on classroom observations — teachers visiting each other's rooms to observe the amount of learning taking place. "Observers should know what to look for when they enter the room," Firle said. **Teachers were trained to watch for certain activities:**

- **Active engagement of students**
- **Varied learning activities**
- **A board agenda that matches the lesson being taught**
- **Teachers stopping to ask students if they understand what is being presented**
- **A high level of rigor**
- **Relevance of instruction to students' lives and experiences**

The observations take three to five minutes, followed by a quick meeting away from the classroom for observers to discuss what they have seen. **The observers answer two important questions: Was teaching taking place? Was learning taking place? Then they give immediate feedback to the teachers they observed.**

It is interesting to read some of the feedback from the classroom observations:

- "I can't believe Johnny pays attention in that classroom. I can't get him to do anything to learn the content."
- "The teacher was just talking to herself. No one was paying attention."
- "The teacher had planned a great lesson, but the students were behaving badly."
- "I love how the classroom is organized. I'm going to try some of those strategies."

Firle has implemented a game plan to improve the quality of teaching in all subjects. It consists of ongoing professional development, weekly data/departmental meetings, weekly instructional meetings, collaborative planning and problem-solving teams.

"Every teacher has received extensive training on using data as a tool to move beyond proficiency and strive for excellence," Firle said.

Rain High School students' scores in reading and math on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam have increased substantially. **The percentage of 11th-graders scoring Proficient in reading rose steadily from 69 percent in 2006-2007 to 95 percent in 2011-2012. The percentage of 11th-graders reaching Proficiency in math grew from 73 percent in 2006-2007 to 94 percent in 2011-2012.**

The graduation rate increased from 71 percent in 2007-2008 to 91 percent in 2010-2011. "The method of calculating the graduation rate changed in 2011-2012, so I do not have results for that year," Firle noted.

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Effective School Leaders Give Teachers a Voice in Designing Professional Development and Implementing New Practices

Understanding the Leadership Dispositions That Contribute to School Success

Reginald Green, professor of educational leadership at the University of Memphis in Tennessee, has worked with hundreds of school principals and is the author of textbooks on school leadership. He is engaged in research to identify the leadership dispositions that contribute to school success. Stated simply, how do the beliefs, values and commitments of school leaders affect schools under their leadership?

While teachers have the greatest in-school effect on student learning, principals play a leading role in defining the atmosphere of a school. "That atmosphere can encourage, empower and energize teachers, or it can stifle and demoralize them," Green said. "Every interaction between a principal and his or her teachers affects the school atmosphere in one way or another."

The leader's disposition determines how teachers perceive the leader, whether they trust the leader and whether they are motivated to put forth their best efforts for students. **"Teachers who view their situation and the school leadership in a positive light are more likely to have a positive influence on students," Green said.**

Dispositions stem from beliefs but are identifiable based on behavior. "When a person's actions are not aligned with his or her stated beliefs, it indicates that the beliefs are weakly held," Green said. "Teachers view the discrepancies between beliefs and actions as a lack of integrity, leading to a loss of confidence in the leader."

Based on Behavior

Core beliefs, demonstrated by behavior, are vital to effective leadership. "The leader's beliefs about schools, teachers, children, parents and people in general are the foundation for leadership in school improvement," Green said.

Green challenges principals, assistant principals, education coaches, department or grade-level chairs, and teacher-leaders to answer three questions:

1. What do you believe?
2. What do you value?
3. How do you behave?

Dispositions are deep-seated but not unchangeable. "With a deep understanding of self and the impact of dispositions, leaders can modify their beliefs and values and enhance their leadership performance," Green said.

Green is conducting research for a book that will map the most important dispositions for school leadership and the mechanisms by which the dispositions contribute to school success.

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School Benefits From *Take One!* Professional Development for Teachers and Administrators

Minor High School (MHS) in Adamsville, Alabama, near Birmingham, was one of six schools in the nation to receive a National School Change Award in July 2012. The award is an initiative of the National Principals Leadership Institute.

"Just a few years ago, it would have been hard to imagine Minor High School winning a prestigious national award — or even a state award," said Principal **David Pike**. "The state and the district tried many different strategies to improve the school, but none of the strategies worked," Pike said.

What changed? The principal and most of the teachers stayed the same. The demographics remained at 85 percent black students, 67 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, and 90 percent of students living in an area hit hard by a decline in the steel industry.

The thing that changed was Pike led the way in adopting the *Take One!* professional development opportunity from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). *Take One!* provides a standards-based approach to improve teaching practice. It links student learning to effective instruction.

Participation was not mandatory, but all MHS teachers committed to complete one of six components of the NBPTS assessment for National Board Certified Teachers. In doing so, each teacher would complete the following activities:

- Analyze his or her instructional content.
- Plan a lesson.
- Record the lesson.
- Analyze the recording.
- Reflect on what he or she learned.

Principal Pike and his administrators led the way by teaching and videotaping their own lessons and analyzing the instruction. Some administrators had been out of the classroom for a long time, but did not think it right to ask teachers to do anything they did not do.

"The fact that teachers went through *Take One!* together generated excitement and increased the number of conversations about teaching practices," Pike said. *Take One!* became the major professional development initiative at MHS; all other professional learning focused on helping teachers improve their materials.

"A teacher survey in May 2012 showed that the focus on *Take One!* had resulted in statistically significant gains in teaching quality, collaboration, faculty environment and leadership support for professional learning," Pike said. MHS is also experiencing positive increases in student achievement. For example, the 2011 math assessment scores for special-education students, black students and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches were higher than those of the previous year and exceeded average results for such students in the state and district. The 2011 reading results for the same groups of students also exceeded state, district and previous-year results. Reading Proficiency for the entire school rose from 66 percent in 2008 to 79 percent in 2011.

"The *Take One!* model has allowed us to align our school improvement plan, professional development and student intervention with the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards," Pike said. "The improvement in instruction has resulted in higher student scores."

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Changing School Culture: Specific Strategies for Success

Seneca High School (SHS) in Louisville, Kentucky, developed a plan to address three areas of teaching and learning that its "turnaround team" said needed action. They included increasing academic performance, transforming school culture and making data-informed decisions.

SHS enrolls some 1,500 diverse students. The enrollment includes 45 percent white students, 41 percent black students, 11 percent Hispanic students and 3 percent Asian or mixed-ethnicity students. Seventy-seven percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Eighteen percent speak English as a second, third or fourth language.

The turnaround team consisted of the principal, assistant principals, selected teachers representing diversity of ethnicity and experience, an appointed state educational recovery leader, and an educational recovery literacy specialist. The team was organized after the Kentucky Department of Education identified SHS in 2010-2011 as a "persistently low-achieving school" based on student achievement data and leadership assessment results. Turnaround efforts got under way when **Michelle Dillard** was appointed principal in February 2011.

Academic Performance — The first step was to develop professional learning communities (PLCs) of teachers to collaborate during common planning time each week. The PLCs focused on three questions:

- What do we want students to learn?
- How do we know they have learned it?
- What do we do when they don't learn it?

The PLCs used SharePoint collaboration software to track formative assessments, diagnostic and proficiency results, students targeted for interventions, and results of the interventions. The groups also used SharePoint to post PLC meeting minutes, agendas and common lesson supplements, and common assessments.

Transforming School Culture — One aspect of this activity put teachers in the spotlight to celebrate success in providing extra time and attention to help students meet their academic and life goals. Another aspect included relocating classrooms to support informal collaboration by teachers outside common planning time. The turnaround team heard from guest speakers on topics such as leadership and connecting with black male students. "Above all, administrators and teachers worked to establish and communicate high expectations for all stakeholders," Dillard said.

Data-Informed Decisions — The faculty received professional development in expectations and standardized exam formats. Teachers took a practice ACT before students took the national exam in March. Data days were established to provide PLCs with full-day opportunities to analyze students' work and plan instructional strategies to meet students' needs. Some teachers incorporated a classroom system for students to track their own progress in meeting standards. A system of coordinated interventions included after-school work to recover standards, regrouping students by standards, and lunch-and-learn sessions to redo work. Some students were removed from elective classes or advisory sessions to receive intensive tutoring on recovering a key standard or skill. "We constantly monitored the effectiveness of efforts to increase student achievement," Dillard said.

Results of a New School Culture

The Seneca High School staff exerted a great deal of effort to prepare students for the new state assessment and accountability model that took effect in the 2011-2012 school year. A large proportion (42.4 percent) of Seneca High School students scored at the Proficient or Distinguished level on the end-of-course Algebra II assessment in 2012, compared with 40 percent of students taking the assessment statewide.

Advanced Placement (AP) students at SHS outperformed the state average in five subject areas in 2012: psychology, English literature and composition, English language and composition, U.S. history, and human geography.

The growth in learning shown by comparing PLAN results to ACT results is another sign of progress by SHS students in 2011-2012. SHS students showed improvement at a rate 3.3 percent higher than that of students throughout the state when comparing PLAN to ACT. Specifically, 65.2 percent of SHS students compared with 57.9 percent statewide showed typical or higher growth. "This positive difference of 7.3 percent compared with the state is a prime example of the impact of our programs on students," Dillard said.

The recovery programs at SHS are tracked to monitor the level of success in preparing students to meet state academic standards. The Hawks Intervention Program (HIP) is an after-school recovery initiative that provides targeted extra help in a structured learning environment. **Data from the first half of 2012-2013 showed that SHS students recovered standards in HIP at a growth rate of 43 percent. "This means that the average student staying after school for a HIP session, who may have scored as low as 50 percent on an assessment for a standard, left the HIP session with a 93 percent for that standard,"** Dillard said. **"This average represents 412 students — a substantial number — who received extra help in HIP."**

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Providing Rigorous Professional Development for New Career/Technical Teachers

Every career/technical (CT) student needs and deserves effective CT learning experiences. This effectiveness begins with the preparation of CT teachers entering the classroom. SREB believes that every new CT teacher should be able to:

- plan, deliver and assess engaging instruction that integrates academic content, especially reading and mathematics;
- link technical concepts and standards in the teacher's subject area;
- connect with students' interests, talents and aspirations;
- help students see how course work is tied to all aspects of an industry; and
- equip students with 21st-century skills.

Because professional development to teach essential skills to new teachers was in short supply, SREB and the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE) developed an intensive, high-quality, research-based professional development program to prepare new CT teachers in only 14 months. The induction model is designed to build the capacity of beginning CT teachers and to offer instruction that is intellectually demanding, standards-focused, and aimed at preparing CT students for work and further study. The model also builds the capacity of CT teachers to design instruction that engages students in activities such as project-based learning and cooperative learning.

The preparation of new CT teachers includes two components — high-quality professional development and high-quality school support:

- The **professional development** component includes modules on instructional planning, instructional strategies, classroom management and assessment. Teachers participate in a 10-day summer session, monthly sessions, a series of webinars during the school year and another 10-day summer session after the first year. They experience growth as they learn and try new concepts and strategies and receive feedback on performance.
- The **school support** component consists of a trained on-site mentor, the support of a trained administrator, regular interaction with peers, and observation and feedback from a professional development instructor, as well as electronic communities of practice.

When implemented with fidelity, the combination of high-quality professional development and high-quality site-based support by mentors, administrators and coaches is expected to result in increased levels of competence, effectiveness and career commitment by CT teachers.

The new program was field-tested with four cohorts of new CT teachers in two states over a three-year period. The results were encouraging:

- The content was relevant and met the needs of new CT teachers.
- Teachers experienced a productive struggle in the beginning and needed support and coaching from program instructors. Teachers said the first summer session helped them become competent teachers.
- Teachers established a community of practice in which they learned to reflect on instruction, provide face-to-face feedback from others and continuously improve.
- Teachers who had regular contact with mentors and administrators experienced a greater sense of support and felt a part of the school.

"Research by SREB and others on career/tech teacher attrition had shown that between 25 percent and 75 percent of new career/technical teachers left the classroom within the first three years," said Nancy Headrick of SREB, director of the professional development program. Teachers in the four cohorts had an average retention rate from the first to the next year of teaching of 86 percent.

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Create and Support Growth Plans for Principals, Teachers and School Leaders

Something to Talk About: Teacher-Led Vertical Teams That Work

Collaboration among teachers is vitally important to help students meet higher standards and prepare for college and careers. **Port Aransas Independent School District** in Port Aransas, Texas, has found success during four years of integrating vertical team strategies into the school culture. The district includes **Port Aransas High School**, **Brundrett Middle School**, and **Olsen Elementary School**.

Melanie Mayer, an English/language arts (ELA) teacher and college readiness/staff development specialist with 25 years of educational experience, was assigned to facilitate the vertical team effort. She works with school administrators to select team leaders.

Every six weeks, the K-12 core area teachers in the district, along with para-professionals, special-education teachers, elective teachers, career/technical instructors and librarians, meet in teams to discuss topics of importance to schools in the district. The vertical teams are in the core areas of ELA, mathematics, science and social studies.

Introducing Big Ideas

Each meeting begins with a general assembly during which teachers are introduced to the big ideas such as assessment scores, curriculum changes and instructional techniques. The assembly may feature motivational videos or examples of teaching strategies. After the teams meet individually, all members join together for debriefing and reflection.

"We have gained respect for the demands of others...from the kindergarten teacher who expects students to work independently on reading and writing, to the fourth-grade teacher who published Animoto web application videos of student poetry, to the 11th-grade teachers who prepare students to take exit exams."

Melanie Mayer, Port Aransas Independent School District

Team leaders send out lists of talking points before the meetings to enable teachers to prepare questions, concerns and information they want to share with others at the meetings. Sometimes Mayer sends articles for teachers to read — or curricula and assessment scores for them to review — in advance of the meeting. At other times, team leaders facilitate book studies or open discussions. Members describe recent professional development experiences.

Vertical team topics range from curriculum alignment and common vocabulary for all subjects to eliminating gaps in student achievement and ensuring consistency in grading and assessing students. A number of actions have originated in the vertical teams:

- **Common Vocabulary —** Members of the ELA vertical team discovered that teachers from one grade to another were using a variety of words or terms to describe the same thing. For example, "expository writing" was being taught as a required part of the curriculum, but various teachers were referring to it as informative writing, cause and effect, explaining, comparing and describing. Many ninth-graders asked to write an expository essay on the state assessment did not understand what was required of them. The team made a list of common vocabulary from the state curriculum and college-readiness standards and vowed to be consistent with students in the classroom.

- **Grading —** The ELA team has had conversations on using rubrics; giving weight in grades to grammar and style; and the organization, depth, and creativity of a written assignment. "We need to agree, at least within a letter grade, on how to score our students' papers," Mayer said.

- **Curriculum Alignment and Instructional Strategies —** Vertical team meetings made teachers aware of the need to align the curriculum K-12 and to know who is teaching what — and when. Teachers need to know what is being taught in grades below and above and what techniques and expectations are being incorporated into learning. Members of the ELA team discussed how to use reading to teach writing after completing a study of Mayer's book *Two Roads Diverged and I Took Both: Meaningful Writing Instruction in an Age of Testing.* They have also learned how to incorporate more nonfiction and computer reading and writing into the curriculum. "Members share instructional strategies for teaching voice, research, poetry and grammar and recommend helpful websites and magazine articles," Mayer said. "When a team member has a great classroom experience, we hear about it."

- **Instructional Rounds** — This concept grew out of vertical teaming. A teacher-leader accompanies two or three teachers to another teacher's classroom at a pre-determined time. The group spends 20 minutes observing and then leaves the classroom to debrief. "We observe with a specific goal in mind," Mayer said. The situations they encounter may include classroom management of unruly students, co-teaching with a special-education or a regular-education teacher in an inclusion setting, student engagement in a group activity, or use of technology to teach a lesson. "I have been amazed to witness a fourth-grade writing workshop, a seventh-grade science inquiry lab, 10th-grade poetry competitions and kindergarten reading stations," Mayer said.

- **Teacher Camaraderie** — One special outcome of vertical teaming has been the camaraderie developed among teachers in the Port Aransas district. "We have gained respect for the demands of others," Mayer said, "from the kindergarten teacher who expects students to work independently on reading and writing, to the fourth-grade teacher who published Animoto web application videos of student poetry, to the 11th-grade teachers who prepare students to take exit exams."

- **Preparing for New Assessments** — Texas changed its assessments from TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) to STAAR/EOC (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness/End of Course assessments) in 2012. "For the past three years, our vertical teams have looked at the anticipated increase in rigor and the advanced vocabulary and testing style of a skills-based rather than a content-based test," Mayer said. "We particularly studied the college-readiness standards that we knew would comprise a larger portion of the new test." **For example, a primary difference in ELA assessment was the change from reading for information to reading to analyze author style.** "Since the new assessment would require different teaching strategies, we wanted to be proactive rather than reactive about the new standards and assessments through our vertical teams," Mayer said.

When the results of the first round of the new state end-of-course assessments were published, Port Aransas proved to be ahead of schools statewide in the percentages of students passing the new standardized assessments on the first administration.

Subject	Port Aransas Independent School District	State of Texas
Algebra I	94%	83%
Geometry	100	98
English I Writing	70	55
English I Reading	82	68
Biology	94	87
World Geography	100	81

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Using Rubrics to Create a Picture of an Effective Teacher

Teachers often become so involved in establishing a routine, finishing the textbook, covering the curriculum and preparing for a standardized assessment that they forget one of the original goals of education: to stimulate students' thinking.

"Teachers need to ask what it truly means to be a teacher at their school," said SREB mathematics consultant Jason Adair. "If teachers don't see the 'big picture,' how can they expect students to see it?"

Adair offers a practical example to help teachers understand how to define the "big picture." *What do you think are the foundation, pillars and end results of running a marathon?* **"Some teachers might list the foundation as diet and training," Adair said. "The pillars would be to wear the right shoes and clothing, while the end result would be to finish or win the race. Every teacher's plan may be different, but it's okay as long as all teachers have a plan."**

Qualities of a Good Teacher

Adair worked with 25 teachers in the mathematics department of one *HSTW* school. The teachers were organized into five groups. Their goal was to use a process to determine common pillars for the statement, "A teacher is _____." The groups agreed on six qualities or pillars of a good teacher:

- Uses formative assessments daily
- Is consistent
- Applies the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other rigorous standards
- Is motivational
- Is approachable
- Shows compassion

By using a rubric to list the qualities or pillars, teachers can record whether they always, sometimes or never adhere to a certain quality or pillar. If the answer is always, they buy in and consistently demonstrate the quality. Someone who sometimes adheres to a quality sees the merits and may use the quality occasionally. Someone who never adheres to a quality fails to buy in or see the value of the quality.

"The next step is to determine how a quality or pillar would look if someone adhered totally," Adair said. "When teachers examine qualities and judge their success, it's eye-opening in terms of instruction and shows what is happening in the classroom. A rubric allows teachers to watch trends that occur over time."

Rubrics benefit teachers in many ways:

- Using a developed rubric to reflect on teaching practices can serve as formative assessment for the teacher.
- Professional learning communities (PLCs) can use trends brought out by the rubrics as the foundation for discussions.
- Professional development needs can be strategically identified and sought out.
- Teachers can observe other teachers who are experiencing success in certain areas of the rubric.

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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.