Best Practices Newsletter

High Schools Can Become High-Performing and High-Graduating Sites

Superintendents and principals can have a positive and decisive impact on student achievement and higher graduation rates. Their essential leadership can illuminate the path to excellence for faculty and students.

In upgrading curriculum and instruction, school leaders need to keep abreast of practices proven effective in other districts and states. Many schools are making progress by adopting initiatives such as the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC). Those schools and others are introducing project-based learning to engage students more actively and are strengthening advisory and extra-help programs to assist students with their studies.

Sometimes the next step for a school is to organize teachers into interdisciplinary teams and/or to revise grading practices to give students more than one chance to exhibit understanding. For schools wanting to do their best for first-generation students, Boys Town has some suggestions that have proven effective.

The following collection of outstanding practices will answer many questions from school leaders and teachers as schools step up their efforts to ensure all students are college- and career-ready.

Learning Acceleration Program (LAP) Meets the Needs of Diverse Learners

When **Johnny Hunt** became superintendent of the **Public Schools of Robeson County** in Lumberton, North Carolina in 2006-07, the district's graduation rate trailed the state; the dropout rate in the district was higher than the state percentage. Clearly, the district needed to take action to improve the "dismal" outlook for many students.

Superintendent Hunt saw that the district's at-risk students needed new opportunities to learn in a totally different atmosphere outside the regular classroom. The result was the establishment of the Learning Acceleration Program (LAP) at the district's career center.

The purpose of LAP is to meet the individual needs of students in an alternative setting so they can fulfill the requirements of a high school education. The program blends a separate location with tutors, counselors and social workers available to prepare students for graduation, further education and careers. The counseling includes reviewing students' graduation plans to provide support and build confidence as needed. The LAP approach is to personalize education and monitor progress.

Program Staff

The program staff includes retired certified teachers and administrators who join other teachers to deliver the curriculum in a hybrid arrangement combining technology and face-to-face contact. The curriculum is the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

Technology is the major learning framework for LAP students, who use it to meet their individual course needs. "Each student can work in a hybrid manner

— at home and in the classroom — to complete the course requirements," said **Linda Emanuel**, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

"The assignments and expected outcomes of each class are posted daily," Emanuel continued. "Students use supplemental research to respond appropriately to each assignment. Additionally, each student can work at his or her own pace to ensure maximum understanding of the content. The student work is completed through Moodle, a software e-learning platform."

Growing Enrollment

Data showed that 2 percent to 5 percent of students from each high school in the district needed to attend LAP. The number of students referred to and enrolled in LAP tripled in two semesters to as high as 175 students in one semester.

The number of students graduating with their cohorts rose 25 percentage points — from 60 percent in 2006-07 to 85 percent in 2011-12. The Robeson district outpaced the state in 2010-11 and 2011-12. The dropout rate fell from 7 percent in 2006-07 to 3 percent in 2011-12, when it was lower than the state rate.

LAP students report that the program provides an opportunity to experience success and to feel that they belong in an academic environment. Parents applaud the second chance that LAP has provided students to complete the requirements to receive a high school diploma.

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Building Leadership Capacity From Within

Two administrators at **Jennings County High School** (JCHS) in North Vernon, Indiana, created an in-house program to increase the leadership capacity of the school's teaching staff. Principal **Tim Taylor** and Assistant Principal **Brent Comer** set goals to recruit potential school leaders within the district and to give teachers insights into how and why administrators make decisions, thus fostering teacher understanding and support of the decisions.

Taylor described schools' leadership dilemmas. "It is estimated that 40 percent of today's principals will retire within the decade," he said. "Over the past decade, 90 percent of districts reported a shortage of high school principal applicants, and 73 percent reported a shortage of elementary principal applicants. The complexity of being a principal discourages many teachers from becoming school leaders."

He personalized the situation by relating that he hired a new assistant principal every year for several years. "About the time they learned what to do, they accepted jobs with other districts and moved on," he said.

That is when Taylor and Comer developed a plan to increase leadership capacity by hosting a series of meetings designed to introduce teachers to many aspects of school leadership. A total of 26 of the 90 teaching staff

members at JCHS volunteered to attend the meetings for an hour before school every other Wednesday.

The meetings included such topics as common sense leadership, situational decision making and the "seven sins of leadership." Participants conducted mock interviews and role-played difficult administrative situations. "When real issues arose at the school, these teachers understood the process and were willing to help the administrators find solutions," Taylor said.

Teachers benefitted from the meetings by:

- Receiving professional growth points to be used for license renewal;

- Learning about the everyday routine of a school administrator; and

- Hearing from guest speakers about postsecondary leadership programs. Five teachers enrolled in leadership programs at local universities.

"The cost of the program was minimal and brought good results," Taylor said. "There was a marked improvement in the school climate with better communication between administrators and teachers."

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Connecting At-Risk Students to College and Careers

Holmes High School (HHS), with an enrollment of more than 800 students, is the only high school in Covington, Kentucky. Just two years ago, it was falling short in providing the type of preparation needed by students today.

Consider these demographics: Ninety percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; 42 percent are minorities; 32 percent are transient; 23 percent require special education; 15 percent are homeless; and 11 percent reside in one of two public housing developments.

Principal Dennis Maines characterized the situation at HHS in the past as "horrible." Students were taking courses with little or no connection to their goals and dreams and were enrolled in pathways that had no logical sequence of courses. As a result, students graduated without a plan.

Five Priorities

SREB conducted a Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) to help the HHS administration and faculty to identify areas needing improvement. The TAV named five priorities:

- Restructure the schedule to promote effective instructional practices.
- Allow all students to create and follow a pathway of study or an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) related to their career interests.
- Design and implement a comprehensive guidance system.

- Allow time for collaboration between career-technical and academic teachers.
- Provide authentic learning experiences for students to explore career fields.

Career pathway exploration begins in grade six with students talking about career goals and interests. Before entering high school, they create ILPs and review career clusters, careers and life goals.

The freshman academy allows students to explore four of eight career clusters and to choose a focus by the end of the year. Sophomores spend one semester in one career cluster and are grouped into two "houses." The white house consists of public service, information technologies, business and marketing, and creative and performing arts. Students in the red house select from manufacturing and construction, transportation, health sciences and education.

Juniors and seniors are encouraged to earn postsecondary credit. Pathways for doing this include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and community college programs.

Teachers in each cluster meet with 10 to 15 students twice a month on academic focus day and career focus day. Students work on their ILPs, investigate career fields, review transcripts, visit job sites and attend college- and career-networking events.

The Right Direction

"The purpose of linking courses to career goals is to guide students in the right direction," Maines said. School leaders review ILPs to determine courses that should be offered at the school. Counselors review class choices to make sure students are on track and taking courses that are useful to them. Students who want to change their focus are handled on a case-by-case basis, while students who struggle academically are placed in intervention classes.

"It is important to assist students before they enter college and the workforce," Maines said. "Schools need to be flexible to adapt to new technologies and career options as they become available."

The focus on making college and careers relevant to students' aspirations is paying off at HHS:

- Students understand career fields and the many types of jobs available in each field.

- Students make plans and talk about what they are going to do after high school.

- They realize the importance of ACT scores and benchmarking.

- The number of college credit hours earned by each student is announced at graduation.

- Fewer HHS graduates are taking remedial college courses.

- Forty percent of graduates in 2013 earned at minimum 354 postsecondary credit hours.

"More than 500 of our students take courses at Chapman Career-Technical Center," Maines said. "We will continue to foster collaboration between career-tech and academic teachers. We also plan to work closer with our feeder middle grades schools and elementary schools to help students begin early to prepare for college and careers."

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Achieve Success for Every Student: Revise Grading Practices

"Low grades do not motivate students. Assigning a grade of D does not light a fire under a student to buckle down and study harder. A zero skews the grade to a point where accuracy is distorted."

Teachers at **Cigarroa High School** (CHS) in Laredo, Texas, implemented a tactic in 2012-13 known as Achieving Success for Every Student. Meeting in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by department, they developed guidelines on how to grade students. The guidelines required students to complete all work and to revise/redo work below a grade of 70 (or in many cases 80). The intent was to ensure that grades reflected mastery of standards. Students attended reteach/tutorial sessions either during lunch or after school. Teachers increased the use of non-graded formative assessments. **As a result, CHS lowered the failure rate from the first to the sixth six-week period by 37 percentage points.**

SREB school improvement consultant **Alan Veach** told the Cigarroa High School success story after setting the scene this way: "One of the most misused, misunderstood and mistrusted issues in public schooling is how we have communicated student achievement and progress to our students and parents." Veach believes grades should show students, parents and teachers exactly what students know and are able to do. He also believes grades should tell "what quality work looks like."

Schools need to answer these questions:

- Why do we grade? Which reason is most important?

- Do we want grades to represent what students have mastered and be able to use in the future?

- Are we confident that we are using a quality-over-quantity approach to grading?

- Are assignments and assessments aligned to grade-level standards or higher?

- Can we show others that we have parity in grading and equal service to students?

- Are we willing to address key issues that raise student achievement and motivation?

"Some researchers who have focused on improving the performance of lower-achieving students argue that students continue to learn when they make corrections and resubmit work, retake tests, complete late assignments and rewrite papers," Veach said. Yet some teachers, administrators, students and parents believe such practices are "unfair" and instead of holding students responsible for demonstrating mastery of assignments, they encourage student irresponsibility.

Formative and Summative Assessments

Another issue in grading is how to achieve a balance between formative and summative assessments. **Formative assessments** are useful to students and teachers as checkpoints of students' progress. Often, they are not counted as part of students' grades.

Students take **summative assessments** at the end of learning to show what they have gained. Teachers use summative assessments to evaluate learning, certify competence and assign grades.

"Low grades do not motivate students," Veach said. "Assigning a grade of D does not light a fire under a student to buckle down and study harder. A zero skews the grade to a point where accuracy is distorted."

According to Veach, the primary reason for failure in the middle grades and the ninth grade is that students do not complete their school work. "Requiring students to finish their work teaches responsibility and accountability," he said. "It is a practice that reflects the workplace where employees must redo work to meet job standards."

When student failures decrease, student behavior improves, state and national assessment scores rise, and students stay in school, Veach said.

What Can Schools Do?

To ensure the success of more students, schools need to:

- Give all students assignments that reflect grade-level expectations.
- Research grading practices through news articles and publications.
- Provide professional development on standards-based grading, formative and summative assessments, redo policies and mandatory extra-help opportunities.
- Identify teachers who are using standards-based grading and make it possible for them to share their practices.

- Communicate with and visit other schools that have succeeded in using standards-based grading.
- Assure parents that certain things will not change, but students will be expected to complete their work and receive grades based on standards.
- Develop guidelines tailored to each department.
- Develop unit outlines (course syllabi) for same-subject assessments to show that students can read and understand.
- Provide common planning time for teachers to develop grade-level assignments with a literacy component and assessments that measure literacy and content achievement. Develop assignments that require reading grade-level texts and use grade-level texts in all subjects.
- Ensure that teachers develop assessments to match grade-level literacy standards.
- Provide copies of the grading procedures and samples of formative and summative assessments to all teachers and the leadership team.
- Develop a timeline for implementation.

Schools will need guidelines for revising or redoing work. "The guidelines should explain to students and parents how the new procedures will affect students' grades," Veach said.

Other things that schools can do are:

- Inform parents through course syllabi, during parent orientation and at parent/teacher conferences. When possible, ask parents to sign work that is redone.
- Develop a form outlining the protocol for redoing work. Ask students to attach the original work and the redo work.
- Add a step to the redo policy that ensures re-learning and illustrates students' effort and commitment to reach proficiency.
- Consider a different instructional and assignment format for the redo. It may be just as useful to ask students a series of oral questions as it is to develop a different version of an appropriate exam.
- Consider the grading aspects of redoing work. If grades reflect students' proficiency on standards, teachers must give the highest grade. Averaging two grades does not give an accurate assessment of proficiency.

- Allow professional discretion as needed. Sometimes students "blow off" assignments and abuse the redo opportunities. Handle this situation as a character issue and talk with the student. Rescind the redo opportunity if needed.

"In real life, we have multiple opportunities to achieve important milestones," Veach said. "This includes certificates, driver's licenses, SATs, bar exams, medical board exams, etc. Why not allow students more than one chance to meet standards?"

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Schoolwide Approach Improves Student Achievement and Graduation Rates

Spring Hill High School (SHHS) in Columbia, Tennessee, is making good strides in improving student achievement and raising graduation rates. The school enrollment of 944 students in 2013-14 includes these demographics: 75.4 percent white, 15.2 percent black, 7.8 Hispanic, 1.4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and .2 percent Native American/Alaskan. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 31.3 percent.

"We have tried to create a more personalized educational experience for our students," said Principal **Richard Callahan**. "We chose initiatives that were sound, fundamental, cost little or nothing to implement, and contained practices that any teacher with the right effort can use with students."

Some of the initiatives to sustain achievement, growth and the graduation rate are:

- **Standards-Based Grading (SBG)** — Grades are based on the level of course content mastery. Homework and classroom practices may be assigned by teachers, but the grade will not be calculated in the final class average. Only assignments that are designed to measure the level of content mastery will be entered and weighted in grade calculations. Pretests and other formative assessments may be shown in the grade book but will not be weighted in the final grade calculations. "Standards-based grading provides clear, accurate feedback," Callahan said. "The focus is on learning rather than compliance." SBG communicates readiness for the next level and promotes a better match between grades and standardized or state assessment results. The practice leads to a culture that motivates all students to achieve.

- **Mentoring Program for At-Risk Students** — After teachers identify struggling students, school leaders find a pair of adults in the school to take an interest in each student. The mentors help their assigned students create a development plan. They also track grades and other student behaviors.

- **Ninth-Grade Academy** — Anticipating graduation issues, the school opened the academy in 2006 to group freshmen for more personal instruction before they enter the challenging upper grades.

- **Raider Time** — Thirty minutes are set aside during the school day for students to receive tutoring, complete makeup work, retake exams, recover credit, serve detentions and participate in any other activities to assist those who are struggling academically.

- **Higher-Order Instruction, Questioning and Assessments** — Students are responding positively to the additional emphasis on college- and career-readiness as posed by SREB's High Schools That Work initiative.

SHHS has adopted the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) to improve students' reading and writing skills. Students are expected to read 10 to 20 books per year. Teachers use the LDC structure to help students understand the major literacy concepts and build vocabulary.

"Because adults are spending more time with students and giving them more tools for learning, our scores and completion rates are rising," Callahan said. "Our students exceed state and district averages in Algebra I, English II and biology.

The graduation rate climbed from 70 percent in 2008 to 93.6 in 2013, exceeding the district and the state. Our ACT scores are improving and forming a closer relationship with students' grade point averages."

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Creating an LDC Module to Help Students Understand the U. S. Presidential Election Process

Eighth-grade social studies students at **Gra-Mar Middle School** in Nashville, Tennessee, attracted local newspaper and TV coverage for completing a Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) module based on the U.S. presidential election process.

Gra-Mar serves 440 students. The school's demographics are 73 percent black, 17 percent white, 8 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian. A significant 96 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged.

SREB's Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW) initiative was asked to send a literacy consultant and a school improvement consultant to Gra-Mar in 2012-13 to help improve students' literacy skills. Teachers were organized into teams to learn how to use the LDC framework, which allows teachers to build content on a coherent approach to literacy that is hardwired to the college- and career-readiness standards (CCRS).

Developing a Module

As a result of the training, Gra-Mar library media specialist **Patricia Parker** developed an LDC module with this essential question: *Should the U.S. Presidential election process be changed to a popular vote by the people instead of using the current Electoral College?*

After reading informational texts, write an editorial that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the text(s).

The learning activities included:

- An editorial essay;
- A mock Electoral College vote;
- A Gra-Mar popular vote election;
- A campaign poster contest;
- Editorials for *The Tennessean* newspaper;
- Coverage by a local TV station; and
- An election-themed school assembly.

The social studies students had already learned about the three branches of government, the balance of power as a shared endeavor, how the U.S. Constitution is a guiding document for the nation, the qualifications for leaders, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The module was developed and implemented in October 2012, a few weeks before the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

Argumentative Essays

Following active reading, note taking and other activities, students were asked to take a position on the proposed question and to develop an editorial supporting the position statement with evidence from their research materials. Argumentative editorials by two Gra-Mar students were selected to appear in a special edition of *The Tennessean* newspaper. Students had learned that the 500-word editorials should address an essential question that is significant and two-sided, worded in simple language, based on prior knowledge and thought provoking.

To learn about the Electoral College, students watched a video on the Internet and used the Cornell note-taking method to jot down things they wanted to remember.

All Gra-Mar students participated in a mock Electoral College vote in their homerooms. The local election commission placed voting machines in the school library so that all Gra-Mar students could experience the voting process. The results determined the popular vote for each presidential candidate. Students also voted on their favorite foods, sneakers and pop stars.

At the end of the day, students attended a school assembly program where a state legislator and a legislative candidate spoke on citizenship, making state laws, respecting the right to vote, and the availability of education to U.S. children. Students heard the results of the mock election and a local television station provided news coverage of election day at Gra-Mar.

Looking to the Future

One hard-working eighth-grader said, "Now I know more about being an editorial journalist. That is what I want to be."

Parker and Gra-Mar literacy coach **Erica Adkins** were ready to begin a second LDC module. "I have never seen Gra-Mar students so invested in their work," Parker said.

Data from the Tennessee Department of Education showed gains for Gra-Mar students in language arts from 2011 to 2012. Overall, students in grades five through eight demonstrated a 5 percentage-point gain on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) English/language arts (ELA) assessment. Eighth-graders showed a 13 percentage-point gain, while fifth-graders posted an 8 percentage-point gain.

"Students at these grade levels were taught rigorous, Common Core-aligned LDC units," Parker said. "As a result, they demonstrated the highest gains on the state assessment. In addition, 27 percent of students in an LDC teacher's ELA class scored Proficient/Advanced on the state writing assessment, compared with only 10 percent of students in a non-LDC teacher's class scoring Proficient/Advanced."

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Project-Based Learning Strengthens 21st-Century Skills

The health technology program at **Butler Technology and Career Development Schools** in Hamilton, Ohio, integrates academic and technical knowledge in preparing students to become competent health care providers in a rapidly growing career field. The health technology program includes college-level courses such as medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, and allied health, as well as core subjects in the therapeutic, diagnostic and health information clusters, plus medical office management.

As part of the curriculum, students engage in project-based learning (PBL) activities that require extended inquiry in response to an actual problem or issue associated with health careers — in other words, what students can expect to find in the workplace.

Rebecca Hickey, a registered nurse who teaches health technology at Butler Tech, defines PBL as "an authentic, real-world project based on a highly motivating and engaging question, task or problem to teach students academic content in the context of working cooperatively to solve the problem."

Hickey says PBL is effective because it:

- Involves real-world problems that can be complex and relevant and can lead to deeper understanding of a topic or a problem;

- Requires inquiry to create questions that lead to answers and conclusions;

- Incorporates 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and innovation, and lifelong learning and personal management;

- Allows for differentiated instruction to provide different avenues to acquire content so that all students in a classroom can learn effectively;

- Increases the use of technology through research and presentations; and

- Addresses the CCRS or other rigorous standards.

"Project-based learning may be difficult for some teachers to implement, but all hurdles can be overcome through proper training and support," Hickey said.

PBL is organized around an open-ended "driving question" that frames important issues or problems and creates interest among students. The teacher serves as facilitator, but students are in charge of their work. Time in class is devoted to roundtable discussions, peer reviews, peer revisions, and discussions of the work of each group of students.

"A good project should be at the highest cognitive level, making it possible for students to analyze and evaluate an issue and justify their answers," Hickey said. "Students take greater interest in a lesson if they have control, are doing something that interests them, and can see that the end result will help them in a career in the future."

Students explore community issues, interact with experts and adult mentors, and develop their presentation skills as they unveil their projects to career professionals. The presentation should involve technology through videos, electronic portfolios and other materials gathered during the project.

Here are some examples of projects:

- Careers Exploration Research, incorporating research, job shadowing and college exploration

- Vision and Hearing Disease and Safety

- Hypertension prevention and disease processes

- Designing a medical facility, including a budget, salaries and job descriptions

- Solvents and Solutions, a project in conjunction with the science and mathematics departments

- A final project for many college credit classes

"All projects incorporate the college- and career-readiness standards in language arts, economics, anatomy and physiology, and chemistry," Hickey said. "Every project incorporates 21st-century skills with a technology component, research reporting and communication through presentations, usually to groups of professionals. It is a bonus for students when successful projects can be used in competitions for Career and Technology Student Organizations."

Some roadblocks exist as teachers begin to use PBL with their students: PBL changes the way students learn and teachers teach. It should not be used for all units or lessons. Groups of students should be selected wisely, and teachers need to have effective classroom management skills. "It may not work perfectly the first time, but it will improve with each attempt," Hickey said.

The Buck Institute for Education (BIE) is dedicated to improving 21st-century teaching and learning by creating and disseminating products, practices and knowledge for effective PBL. Find BIE online at www.bie.org.

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Interdisciplinary Teams Plan, Coordinate and Evaluate Curriculum and Instruction Across Academic Areas

Schools that have succeeded in organizing their teachers into interdisciplinary teams are benefitting students as they prepare for college and careers. "The interdisciplinary approach is associated with better student self-concepts, positive attitudes toward school, fewer disciplinary problems and better social adjustments," said SREB school improvement consultant **Alan Veach**. "The practice has contributed to lower failure rates and higher attendance rates."

An interdisciplinary team is a way to join teachers from different subject areas with the students they commonly instruct. Rather than operate in isolation, teachers work with the same group of students, reach consistent standards for classroom behavior and assignment formats, coordinate important assignments to avoid schedule conflicts, and develop interdisciplinary units that draw upon multiple subject areas.

"Basically, interdisciplinary teaming may mean implementing a smaller specialized school that focuses on the needs of a particular group of students within the context of a larger school," Veach said.

Common Set of Students

Teams usually consist of two to five teachers who pool their resources, interests, experiences and knowledge of young people to assume joint responsibility for meeting a large part of the instructional, social and emotional needs of a group of students. Ninth-grade teams usually contain English, mathematics, science and social studies teachers, plus career-technical teachers if possible.

Interdisciplinary teams allow teachers to become more involved in the decision-making process of the school, thus becoming more closely connected to the entire learning process. They need to have autonomy to do what is best for their students. The team leader functions more as a facilitator than as a boss. Leaders may be appointed by the principal, selected by team members or rotated among team members. "Many principals report that the job being done by the team leader is the secret to the success of the very best team," Veach said.

Effective teams are housed in the same section of the school building to make it possible for teachers to move students between classrooms for extra help and to discuss issues in the time before classes. The physical location, including hall space, may be decorated with student projects and bulletin boards.

The standards-based approach to learning begins with the premise that all students can learn, but some may need extra help and time. Interdisciplinary teams need to realize what it means to achieve grade-level standards and how student work and assessments look when they are aligned to standards.

SREB research has shown that students benefit from completing projects that are planned jointly by academic and career-technical teachers, preferably during common planning time. Collaboration enables teachers to align their learning objectives for students, blend academic and career-technical studies to reflect real life more accurately, and motivate students to achieve in academic and career-technical classrooms. "Teams must ensure that students engage in authentic learning so that they see a connection between what they are asked to do in class and what they will do in life beyond school," Veach said.

When a school is implementing a redo policy or a no-zeros policy, it is much easier for a group of interdisciplinary teachers to collaborate on how and when students will be re-taught and re-assessed. Teacher teams can set up mandatory tutorials before and after school, during lunch and on Saturdays. "Effective teams make lists so that they can discuss the needs of each student during common planning time," Veach said.

Common Planning Time

Teams must have common planning time built into the school day. "Ideally, they should meet for one-half hour at least four times a week," Veach said.

Dawn Fontaine, instructional leadership specialist at **The High School of Commerce**, an International Baccalaureate (IB) school in Springfield, Massachusetts, said common planning time is critical to the success of an interdisciplinary team. At a basic level, teams use common planning time to plan and coordinate team activities such as homework, projects and assessments. At an advanced level, teams coordinate and integrate curriculum, instructional activities and assessments.

Teachers discuss individual students during common planning time, particularly those at risk. They can quickly determine whether a student who is having difficulty in one class is having similar problems in other classes.

Student and parent conferences are another use of common planning time. Students, parents and teachers can address the issues in a positive way and develop a plan of action for improvement.

Team meetings should have weekly and daily agendas. Some standard agenda items include:

- **Assessing students' progress**. Review and record student data such as attendance, grades and behavior. Decide which students need extra help. Review the progress of students already receiving extra help. Document and review parent contacts regarding student progress.

- **Curriculum and instruction**. Share ideas, concerns, strategies and resources to improve teaching and learning. Plan and evaluate interdisciplinary projects. Review student work.

- **Motivation and Recognition**. Plan and coordinate team assemblies, celebrations, student rewards and newsletters. Organize career development activities.

- **Team Management**. Discuss team progress, issues and concerns. Record minutes and send to school administrators and other teams. Plan the agenda for the next meeting.

"All team members should leave the meeting understanding the team's progress in raising student achievement and steps to be taken before the next meeting," Veach said.

Professional Development

Professional development is essential when a school switches from a departmentalized or self-contained classroom arrangement to an interdisciplinary team organization. It needs to begin early in the school year, continue intensely during the first year of implementation and be offered periodically thereafter. "The first and easiest part of staff development is to explain the concept of teaming and why it is needed," Veach said. "The second aspect is to recognize the concerns of teachers moving to teaming. Once they get beyond personal concerns, teachers will have management issues that can be addressed through staff development."

The High School of Commerce implemented interdisciplinary teaming in grade nine in 2012-13. An assistant principal met with the teams to discuss attendance and behavior issues and to provide student data on a regular basis. As the instructional leadership specialist, Fontaine met with each team at least twice a week to discuss instructional issues. She provided professional development on rigor, lesson design and assessment.

"Teachers were able to collaborate on instructional issues and implement common instructional practices across the curriculum," Fontaine said. "It created consistency across subjects and helped link courses together."

The efforts of the freshman teams at The High School of Commerce contributed to an overall decline in the failure rate of 20 percentage points. The rate dropped from 49 percent in 2011, before interdisciplinary teaming was implemented, to 29 percent in fall 2013. The average monthly attendance improved from 79 percent in 2011-12 to 82 percent in 2012-13 to 89 percent in 2013-14.

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One School Learns to Stop Worrying and Love Advisory

Many students at **Alamogordo High School** (AHS) in Alamogordo, New Mexico, needed additional help to cope with high school now and life in the future. So school leaders and counselors designed an advisory program that gives students information and assistance in becoming college- and career-ready. The program also contains time for students to study or receive extra help.

The 1,400 students in grades nine through 12 are demographically diverse, including 58.8 percent white, 30.5 percent Hispanic, 5 percent black, 2.7 percent two or more races, 1.6 percent Asian and 1.4 percent "other." The school and community are characterized by many single-parent households, many teenage pregnancies and high referrals to juvenile probation.

"We definitely needed a system of support for our students," said science teacher **Chris Senior**, one of the organizers of the multi-faceted guidance and advisory system. The sessions, which are delivered by trained teachers, are designed to:

- See the student as a whole, not just in one class or subject;
- Work with small groups to explore education and career possibilities;
- Provide an approved curriculum for academic, social and personal growth, and career development; and
- Help students see why education is relevant to their futures.

Teachers Develop Lessons

"A team of teachers began to use this definition of advisory to develop a program that would make sense for students," said health and physical education teacher **Trude Trudell**. Each teacher on the team was responsible for developing advisory lessons for their assigned grade levels. Some examples of lessons include establishing relationships in grade nine, exploring career pathways in grade 10, exam-taking strategies for SAT/ACT in grade 11, and financial management (banking, budgeting and credit cards) in grade 12.

Teams of 15 to 20 students meet with their teacher-advisers twice a week for 90 minutes. The advisory lessons are delivered for the first 30 minutes on Tuesday;

students participate in 30 minutes of Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) at the start of the Thursday session. **Students use the remaining 60 minutes of each advisory day to receive extra help or acceleration in a class. If they choose to remain with advisory, they study individually or in groups.**

Teacher-advisers remain with their students for all four years of high school. "They become the go-to people when students have needs or questions," Senior said.

Schoolwide conferences for parents, students and teachers are scheduled twice a year—in the fall to discuss testing, grades and other topics and in the second semester to schedule students for the coming year. Teachers are flexible with their time, meeting with parents early in the morning or late at night. Both groups have found the process very valuable. **The percentages of students and parents participating in the conferences were 88 percent in the first year in 2011-12 and 92 percent in 2012-13.**

Students Support Advisory

Students support the advisory program. One 10th-grader said, "I recently moved to Alamogordo from North Dakota. All 17 students in my group and the teacher-adviser welcomed me and helped me make the transition into school. We have fun in advisory while learning important things that will help us stay on track through high school."

Another student told her teacher-adviser, "Thank you so much for everything you do for me. You motivate me every day to do my best and keep moving forward.

I've had a difficult year, but you have helped me see the light throughout the hard times. You were there no matter what was happening. I am so blessed to have you for advisory."

Trudell said, "The program works! Students are getting information to help them plan for the future through grade-level advisory lessons. They are receiving additional academic support through the enrichment component of the program.

"Change is never easy," Trudell continued. "It takes work from teachers and support from administrators to implement a program that is effective and lasting. Just try it! Your school will learn to love advisory, too."

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School Offers Multiple Approaches for Extra Help During the Day

After reviewing students' grades of D and F, the staff at **Bonney Lake High School** (BLHS) in Bonney Lake, Washington, implemented multiple approaches for extra help to raise student achievement. "Twenty to 30 percent of our students were either failing or earning a D in English, mathematics and social studies," said counselor **Eric Crinklaw**. "We were experiencing a significant reduction in the percentage of students meeting High Schools That Work readiness goals."

BLHS enrolls 1,347 students in grades nine through 12. The demographics are 79.6 percent white, 7 percent Hispanic, 6.8 percent multi-racial, 2.8 percent Pacific Islander, 2.4 percent Asian and 1.4 percent black.

The school offers five ways for students to receive extra help during the school day:

- **Enhanced Teaming** — Teams of 90 students work on English, mathematics and science in grade nine. Teams of 60 students focus on English and social studies in grade 10. The students also develop study skills and leadership traits. The teams operate autonomously and are able to create extra-help sessions, conferencing and time to do missing work.

Teachers have common planning time to integrate lesson plans and coordinate scheduling based on the needs of students.

- **Double Dosing** — A second mathematics class was created to provide additional support and instruction for freshmen. Each mathematics teacher is the instructor for three team sections. Students are chosen from these three sections to form an extensions class taught by the mathematics teacher on the team. The class has a maximum of 20 students and is focused on pre-teaching or reteaching the concepts covered in the team's mathematics class. One student said, "Math extensions should be held at every grade level. It is the best class ever."

- **Advisory Review** — Students attend a 45-minute advisory meeting once a week. Teacher-advisers remain with their students all four years of high school. Every grading period, each student fills out a grade check form and attends a conference with the advisory teacher. Goal setting is being added to the review sessions.

- **PRIDE Time** — Students use "passes" to get help from the teachers of their choice. PRIDE Time is held for 30 minutes each week. Students receive assistance with a specific skill; make up or finish a lab; and do individual or small group work on a concept such as graphing, writing a research paper, building vocabulary or conjugating verbs. They can receive re-teaching on a concept or skill and review or learn study skills. Other activities include studying for an upcoming exam, reviewing vocabulary, finishing an outline or rough draft of a paper, completing missing work for a class, finishing homework for an afternoon class or the next day,

and reading silently. One student said, "I think extra help such as PRIDE Time is great for students who are struggling. It means a lot to catch up or get extra help from teachers."

- **Peer Tutoring** — Juniors and seniors provide extra help for freshmen as they transition into high school. They are assigned to an advisory class for the entire school year. As younger students bond with the peer tutors, they build special relationships and become more interested in school. Their behavior also improves.

A ninth-grader summed up the new climate at the school this way: "Our extra-help program is awesome. All of the teachers are really helpful and actually care about students' grades and what they are learning."

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Schools Connect With Parents of First-Generation Graduates

More high schools than ever are focusing on their first-generation graduates—students who are the first in their families to receive high school diplomas and the first to consider entering college. Involving the parents of these students is a critical aspect of making sure that first-generation students are ready to pursue further education and careers.

Susan Lamke, training manager at **Boys Town** in Boys Town, Nebraska, is experienced in dealing with the questions and concerns of parents of first-generation students. "Often, parents aren't sure where to look for information on the best colleges for their children," she said.

As one of the largest child care organizations in the nation, Boys Town is dedicated to serving at-risk children and their families. In addition to providing foster care and counseling, Boys Town works closely with parents (http://www.parenting.org/) and schools (http://www.boystowntraining.org/) to provide social

and emotional learning and behavioral support to students. This support increases educational success in high school and educational opportunities for students after high school.

Because students rely so much on their parents for guidance in choosing a postsecondary institution, Lamke describes the types of parents that school leaders and teachers will encounter while assisting students with a college and career pathway:

- **Handholders** have good intentions and want better futures for their children, but they tend to be controlling and want to do things for the students instead of teaching them how to be independent. Rather than supporting their children in selecting a pathway, these parents may try to take over or over-emphasize "not failing." Sometimes their advice is based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

- **Unavailable** parents may be ill, incarcerated or "out of the picture" for other reasons. Many of these parents are unavailable to students or simply do not see a need for their children to attend college.

- **Happy Medium** parents recognize their limitations and will ask for help. They are easiest for schools to approach.

Several strategies will help schools ensure that parents and students feel more confident about applying, attending and paying for college:

- Promote a schoolwide climate that encourages preparation for college and careers.

- Connect students' course work to future goals.

- Begin preparing students in the middle grades. Use career inventories and personality tests to help students begin the search for a college and career.

- Recommend Advanced Placement (AP) courses for all students. "Even if students fail, they will be more academically prepared," Lamke said.

- Give students options of which colleges to consider, including small colleges, private universities and community colleges.

- Offer admissions seminars at a variety of times on a weekly basis. "It's a great idea to bring first-generation college students back to mentor high school and middle-grades students at their former schools," Lamke said.

Affordability is a big issue facing first-generation graduates and their families. "These families often overestimate the cost of college and underestimate the amount of financial aid available," Lamke said. "It's important to provide early and accurate information about the cost of attending college and the differences in grants, loans and scholarships. Schools can partner with local colleges to explain the financial aid award process."

To help parents feel more at ease, schools can arrange for a college orientation session that includes a typical college day schedule. Campus tours also are valuable to show students where they will study and how to balance social and academic demands.

"Schools can't do everything for students, but they can engage students and parents by understanding each student's interests and aptitudes and emphasizing extracurricular activities to teach habits of success for college and the workplace," Lamke said.

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