

PREMIERE ISSUE

EVIDENCE OF Excellence in Education



Special Offer Inside!

The Journey of Changemakers



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- Transforming priority schools
- Strengthening assessment literacy and efficacy
- Designing and implementing effective interventions and enrichments
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Changemakers in action: the journey starts here



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Key



Large District
(12,000 students or
more enrolled)



Small District
(12,000 students or
fewer enrolled)



Large School
(500 students or
more enrolled)



Small School
(500 students or
fewer enrolled)

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KS, NE, OK



Michele Cook
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West TX



Keri Bosi
NY, NJ, CT, MA, ME,
NH, RI, VT



Sharon Croissant
NC, SC, VA, WV



Catherine McClemens
IN, MI, OH, KY



Kristen Stez
Southern CA



Jean Burnstine
IL, WI



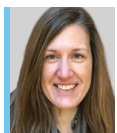
Brian Duggan
WA, OR



TJ Mears
West AR



Jake Thelen
WY, UT, CO



Catie Christenson
Canada



Eric Henry
Northern CA



Shawn Meddock
FL, GA



Jessica Tuttle
IA, MO, MN



Philip Ciano
ID, ND, SD, MT,
HI, AK



Jennifer Ivy
East TX

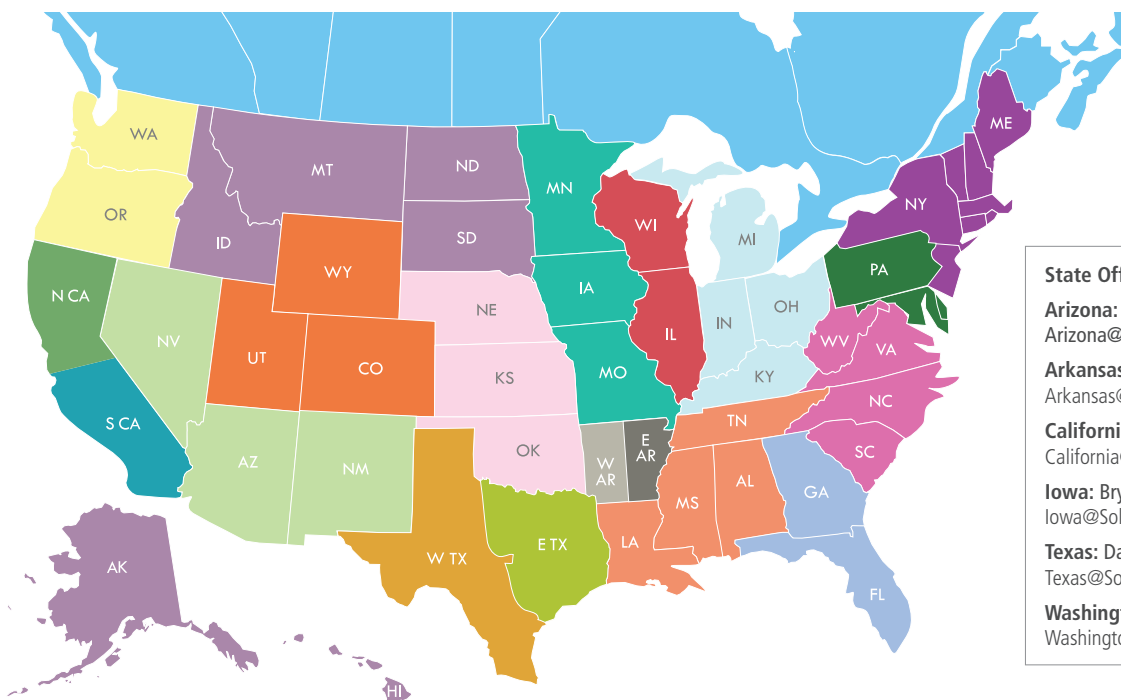


Kathy Natour
LA, MS, AL, TN



Joe Warden
PA, MD, DC, DE

CONTACT YOUR DEP at SolutionTree.com/Partnerships



State Office Executive Directors

Arizona: Alesha Henderson
Arizona@SolutionTree.com

Arkansas: Susan McNully
Arkansas@SolutionTree.com

California: Jessica Rodgers
California@SolutionTree.com

Iowa: Bryce Amos
Iowa@SolutionTree.com

Texas: Darren Grissom
Texas@SolutionTree.com

Washington: Lacy Waltermeyer
Washington@SolutionTree.com



Robert Eaker, author, educator, co-creator of PLC at Work

Improved student learning—kid by kid, skill by skill

By Robert Eaker

The history of the Professional Learning Communities at Work® process is not only a story of success but an inspiration as well. While most initiatives to improve schools have been short-lived, the PLC at Work process is entering its second quarter of a century, and the number of schools and districts implementing the processes continues to increase. PLC at Work schools and districts can be found in every state and province in North America and, increasingly, throughout the world.

What accounts for this longevity? The primary reason—and the most inspiring one—is simply this: it works. When embedded with fidelity and specificity, the PLC at Work process leads to improved student learning, and more professionally satisfying experiences for educators. And inevitably, improved student learning has a positive impact on parents and the larger community.

The staying power of the PLC at Work process can also be attributed to the fact that, unlike most school improvement initiatives, the process and practices in which educators engage are not only research-based, they are practitioner-driven. The fact that teacher teams engage in ongoing action research in order to address the question, “are our students learning, and how do we know?” generates credibility in the work that is being undertaken.

There are now well over 300 Model PLC at Work schools. This demonstrates what can happen when a group of committed educators engage in the right work for the right reasons. The success of the PLC at Work process continues to inspire others to accept the challenge of helping more students learn effectively—kid by kid, skill by skill.



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Lake County Schools

LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **42** schools
- › **36,829** students
- › **100%** free and reduced lunch
- › **4%** English learners
- › **18%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **48.8%** White
- › **26.9%** Hispanic
- › **15.5%** Black
- › **4.1%** Multiracial
- › **2.7%** Asian
- › **0.5%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **1.5%** Other

Lake County Schools is the 19th largest public school district in the state of Florida. Lake County has ranked among the top 10 fastest-growing counties in Florida.



► CHALLENGE

Just prior to committing to the process of becoming a Model PLC at Work® district, Lake County Schools hired Diane Kornegay as superintendent, who then hired Emily Feltner as assistant superintendent. Both women brought with them a belief system deeply rooted in supporting all students, and Emily quickly shared with Diane the importance of the vision and process of Professional Learning Communities at Work.

As a struggling school district that ranked 47th out of 67 school districts in student achievement statewide, the message to Lake County Schools staff was clear. The goal of the new leadership was to end the educational lottery among schools and create a school system that guaranteed learning at high levels for all students.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Collaboration among support staff, teachers, school leaders, and district leaders helped determine what was working and what wasn't working for Lake County Schools students, which led to open communication and teamwork from day one. This created trust and a clear message that the three big ideas of focusing on results, collaboration, and learning would be a priority both at the district and school levels.

Each summer, over 400 lead learners, including district staff, principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders, check in on systemwide progress, set goals, and learn together. They have used select Solution Tree resources, such as *Learning by Doing*, 3rd edition, *Transforming School Culture*, *Time for Change*, and *Overcoming the Achievement Gap Trap* as anchor texts.

Principal meetings have included time to review student subgroup achievement data at the school and district level, identify areas of focus, and determine next steps. As a result of this work, district progress monitoring results show a reduction in the achievement gap in some areas. The district, along with each school, created a guiding coalition that analyzed gaps in data and created an action plan to eliminate these gaps.

Since starting PLC at Work implementation, 183 leaders and teachers have attended a PLC at Work Institute. Having a team trained at every school allows the district to create a common vision, vocabulary, and expectations for implementation of the PLC process. When COVID-19 canceled several institutes, teams participated in a districtwide virtual institute. This learning opportunity allowed first-time attendees to hear directly from the PLC at Work experts and provided an opportunity for those already immersed in the work to reflect and refine their practices.

Collaboration in the school system begins with the superintendent and has a continuous through-line to the student level. The assistant superintendent oversees all departments regarding teaching, learning, and leadership and has an expectation that collaboration occurs weekly within each department and monthly among various departments.

“As we continue to prove the power of the PLC at Work process in closing achievement gaps and achieving equity, Lake County provides us with a new, extremely powerful example.”

—Mike Mattos, author and PLC at Work associate

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Time for collaboration at the school level has been in place for several years. Over the last few years, the district has provided support through the use of district program specialists and school-based literacy coaches to ensure this collaborative time is spent focused on the four questions and supporting teacher and student success.

Understanding that learning occurs at different rates, the focus on intervention and acceleration during the school day became crucial. Time was built into the school day and became an expectation for all schools. Master schedules were changed and every school provided time for intervention and acceleration in addition to just-in-time support during core instruction.

► RESULTS

After four years, the PLC at Work process is the way of work in Lake County Schools. Systems and structures are in place supporting weekly collaboration across the district. Teacher collaborative teams rely on these systems to provide the highly effective instruction all students deserve.

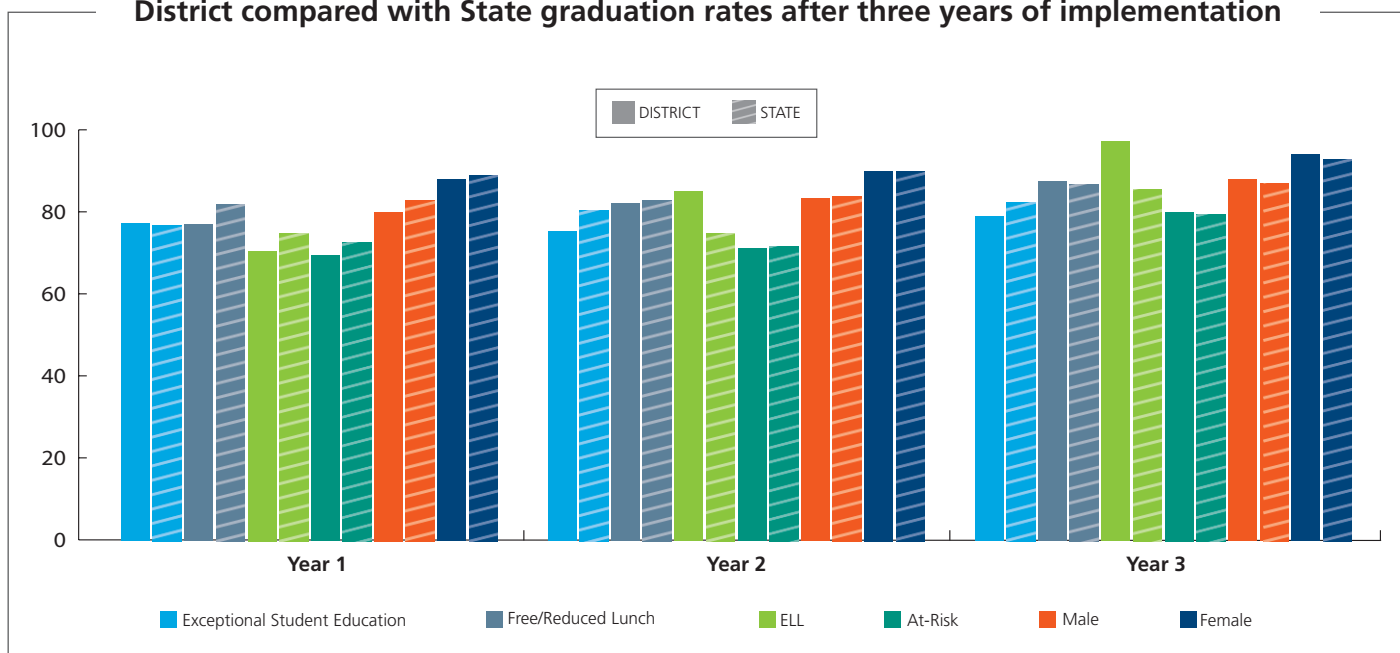
The results of this hard work and commitment are visible and a testament to educators on every campus that this is the right work. **In just three years of implementation, the Lake County Schools state ranking in graduation rate rose from 50th to 22nd. The district is proud to have raised their graduation rate from 78% to 90%, and they have confidence in the processes they have in place to bring them to 100% of students graduating.**

“We were able to quickly identify essential standards for virtual learning lessons across the district, reducing our learning loss as compared to the state,” says Emily Feltner, Lake County assistant superintendent for teaching, learning, and leadership.

“As we continually strive to improve, we know these practices have become beliefs,” Feltner continues. “This common vision for learning, the focus on results, and the work of collaborative teams have aligned expectations and provided a guaranteed and viable curriculum that ensures equitable experiences and high levels of learning for all students across schools.”

The PLC process has also made a difference in learning loss experienced due to school shutdown during the pandemic.

District compared with State graduation rates after three years of implementation



Pasadena Independent School District

PASADENA, TEXAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **67** schools
- › **53,157** students
- › **86.3%** free and reduced lunch
- › **28.9%** English learners
- › **10.4%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **83.4%** Hispanic
- › **7.2%** Black
- › **5.6%** White
- › **3%** Asian
- › **0.6%** Multiracial
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Pasadena Independent School District is based in Pasadena, Texas, a city within the Greater Houston metropolitan area.



Pasadena ISD Model PLC at Work® Schools

- Morris Middle School
- Earnesteen Milstead Middle School
- V.W. Miller Intermediate School

► CHALLENGE

Executive director of curriculum and instruction at Pasadena Independent School District Marsha Jones was first exposed to the PLC at Work® process as a middle school principal. After being introduced to the work of Richard DuFour at an education conference, Jones read his book *Learning by Doing* and was immediately hooked.

"This is where we need to be. This is the direction we need to go," Jones recalled thinking.

The culture across Jones's district was one that Dan Hoppie, executive director of curriculum and instruction, referred to as "siloed." New teachers were handed the keys to their classrooms and then left to work largely in isolation.

School teams worked together on community-building activities like party planning and special events, but they lacked the focus on collaboration and shared goals that would guarantee success for all students.

► IMPLEMENTATION

In the first year of their journey, Pasadena sent 235 school and district leaders to the PLC at Work Institute in San Antonio with the goal of implementing PLCs and promoting collaboration districtwide.

"Each school was able to learn and collaborate together and then take that back to their campuses and begin the work," said Jones. "That conference was a catalyst for districtwide change."

From there, it was a matter of introducing more and more staff to the concept and creating a "unified vision of the powerful impact of PLCs."

As a common language around PLCs developed across the district, focus began to shift away from simply getting through the curriculum each year and centered instead on ensuring that both students and teachers were continually learning and growing in the classroom. This

“ This is the way I honestly think education really should be done.”

—Dan Hoppie, executive director of curriculum and instruction,
Pasadena Independent School District, Texas

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

shift, according to Hoppie, was significant and “a huge benefit” for Pasadena. It led to conversations about why students weren’t learning and how

teachers could provide them with the additional time and support they needed to succeed.

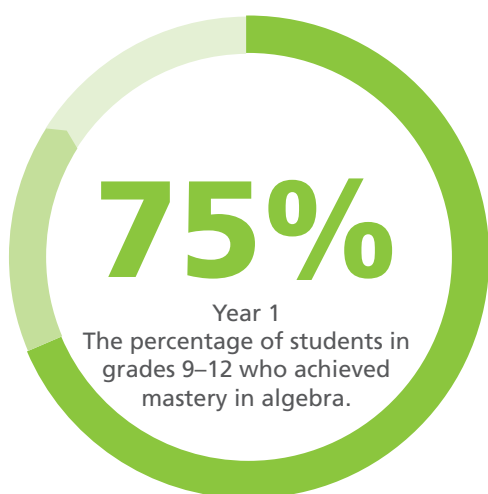
► RESULTS

Since beginning its PLC journey, Pasadena has shown significant gains in student achievement, which district staff educators attribute to the power of authentic collaboration and shared collective commitments. During the sixth year of PLC at Work® implementation at Pasadena, 95.6% of preK students demonstrated emergent literacy skills in writing, and 94.4% demonstrated proficiency in mathematics.

From year three to year six, the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who achieved mastery in algebra rose from 75% to 90%. Pasadena also saw significant jumps in the percentage of students scoring a qualifying score (3–5) on the Advanced Placement exam in 10 of 14 subject areas.

In addition, Jones credited the district’s PLC work for helping Pasadena “weather the storm” of COVID-19. The support of collaborative teams, as well as the strong foundations established during the PLC implementation, gave teachers a source of stability during a time of uncertainty.

“The language and the culture in this district is all around collaborative teams and working through PLC,” Jones said. “It gives me goosebumps. It truly does. We’ve come so far.”



Woodbine Community School District

WOODBINE, IOWA



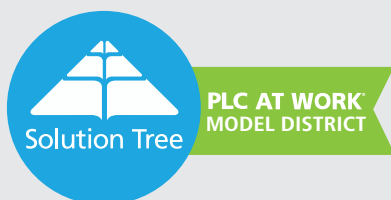
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **447** students
- › **38.3%** free and reduced lunch
- › **11%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **94.6%** White
- › **3.1%** Hispanic
- › **1.6%** Multiracial
- › **0.4%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **0.2%** Asian
- › **0.1%** Other

Woodbine Community School District (WCSD) is a Model PLC at Work® district located in Woodbine, a rural community situated along the Boyer River in western Iowa. WCSD comprises one elementary and one high school serving the families of Woodbine and the surrounding areas.



WOODBINE
Community School District



► CHALLENGE

Beginning in the fall, Woodbine Community School District (WCSD) set out to improve adult agency and student achievement in a personalized manner. This started with revising the district's mission and vision. A team made up of board members, community members, administration, staff, and students came up with a new school vision of "forging innovative alliances and pathways" and a new mission of "providing an environment where all are welcome and given access to personalized, unparalleled experiences that will positively shape futures." Newly hired superintendent Justin Wagner brought his enthusiasm for, and experience with, Professional Learning Communities at Work® to WCSD, determined to bring the district to next-level success through the proven PLC at Work process of continuous school improvement.



► IMPLEMENTATION

During the school year, a guiding coalition consisting of staff and administration from various grade levels and subject areas collaboratively reviewed the PLC at Work process. District leadership attended a virtual PLC at Work Institute and returned with a plan to share the online sessions in a whole-staff professional development day. This kick-started a districtwide commitment to the PLC journey. That commitment catapulted the district's leadership team into creating a 13-step road map to form a personalized learning experience for all K–12 students.

Once the mission and vision were established, the next steps on the road map were to solidify the district's collective commitments in the form of district values and goals—foundational tenets that proved to be critical anchors for the next two years of work.

One crucial takeaway from the PLC at Work Institute was the awareness of an overwhelming amount of standards for teachers to cover and students to learn. Having such an unattainable goal served



We are blessed to have a wonderful, energetic staff. They were very overwhelmed at times, especially with the pandemic unfolding all around us. But people felt comfortable with the leadership. There was trust and a caring environment.”

—Betsy Gale, secondary curriculum and professional development director, Woodbine Community School District, Iowa

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

no purpose but to frustrate staff and students. A key step for WCSD staff was to identify essential standards in their content areas and then align those with state standards. The entire district’s essential standards are kept in a shared spreadsheet so staff at the next grade level knows what is expected of students in that subject area.

Administration and teachers spent significant time the following summer building proficiency rubrics for each essential standard. Building-wide collaborative teams grouped by grade level and subject area started to engage in inquiry-based discussions centered around mastery—a practice that now occurs continuously. Formative assessments aligned with essential standards have become vital to monitor student learning. This allows collaborative teams to assess often and immediately implement instructional changes designed to further student achievement.

WCSD has also implemented Tiger Learning to support students’ unique needs. “Students are allowed to move at the speed of their own learning as they reach proficiency,” says Wagner. “This provides natural extension for students and frees up valuable, limited class time for teachers to work in small groups with students who struggle to attain proficiency.”

To support students struggling to reach proficiency in essential standards, grade-alike and subject-alike teams create SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) goals, such as a certain percentage of students will reach proficiency on an identified standard by the end of a specified month. “This aligns to our district’s academic goal of having all students reach proficiency on all essential standards by the end of the school year,” says Wagner.

► RESULTS

“We fundamentally believe the education system is broken,” says Wagner. “We believe that if you put good people in a bad system, the system wins everytime. It was important for us to create a system of personalization and student ownership of their learning, and that is exactly what we have done.”

► HIGHLIGHTS

YEAR 1

- The statewide proficiency rate of fourth grade students receiving free and reduced lunch was 59%, while Woodbine’s proficiency rate was 71%.
- 73% of Woodbine third grade students on free and reduced lunch were proficient compared to 56% in the state.

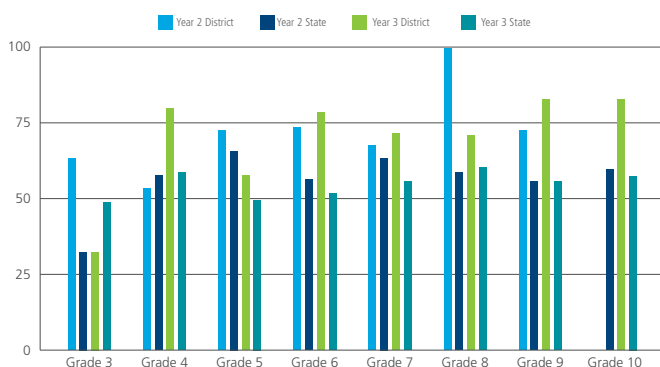
YEAR 2

- Woodbine eighth grade proficiency rate was 15% higher than the state’s in English, 6% higher in math, and 18% higher in science.

YEAR 3

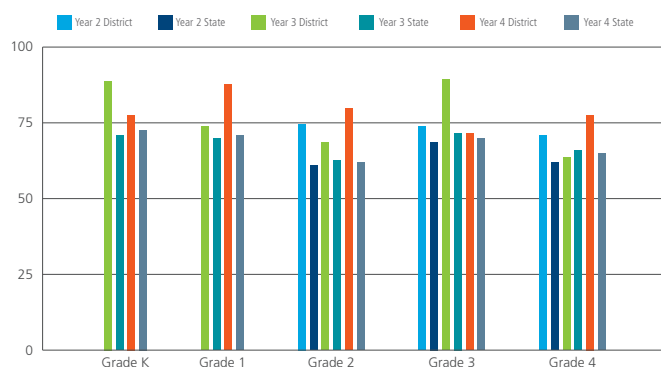
- 66% of fifth grade students on free and reduced lunch at Woodbine were proficient compared to 46% in the state.

Percent Proficiency in ELA:
Free and Reduced Lunch Students at WCSD and Statewide



Source: Iowa Statewide Assessment of Academic Progress

Percent Proficiency in Math:
WCSD Students and Students Statewide



Source: Formative Assessment System for Teachers

Clear Lake Community School District

CLEAR LAKE, IOWA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **1,411** students
- › **28.96%** free and reduced lunch
- › **0.93%** English learners
- › **13.41%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **84.44%** White
- › **6.39%** Hispanic
- › **2.56%** Black
- › **5.51%** Multiracial
- › **1.03%** Asian
- › **0.07%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Clear Lake Community School District is situated just 30 minutes south of the Iowa/Minnesota border and nestled next to the beautiful lake from which the town derived its name. From throughout the town and surrounding area in Cerro Gordo County, over 1,400 K–12 students enroll at Clear Lake CSD, which includes one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school.



► CHALLENGE

Though Clear Lake Community School District had a substantial professional learning community (PLC) in place, their community of educators struggled to maintain their professional development needs. Even though the students were generally achieving success, the data suggested a lack of consistency from grade to grade or even within each subject. Superintendent Doug Gee looked to grow Clear Lake CSD's professional development by reestablishing a commitment to the three big ideas of a PLC: a focus on learning, a collaborative culture and collective responsibility, and a results orientation. "These ideas provided the perfect focus to guide us to a new and exciting culture of growth as professionals," said Gee.

► IMPLEMENTATION

The first step in Clear Lake's journey was to reestablish a firm understanding of the PLC at Work® process for all their educators. They started with their administrative staff participating in a book study of a core title in the PLC at Work canon, *Professional Learning Communities at Work®*, 3rd edition. Afterward, administrative staff and teacher leaders attended a PLC at Work conference where they discovered how best to focus their efforts for the students.

Clear Lake was already performing well as a district. On most of their state assessments, the students were scoring 81% or higher in percent proficient. But, as they started looking at that 81–95% proficiency, they calculated that on average 29 students per grade in grades 3–8 were not proficient in either math, reading, or science, and 50 high school students had failed at least one course the year before. They realized that every child deserved to succeed and that they needed a course correction to reach the students getting left behind.

They implemented subtle changes at first, such as turning staff meetings into focused groups that solely discussed their work in terms of the four critical questions, and devoting all of their Wednesday early dismissals to time for their collaborative teams to meet. They then made larger changes with set expectations for each school, and each principal was expected to work with their building to meet those expectations.

Over the course of the next few years, their focused efforts included changing the makeup of their teacher teams, setting

“As we looked to grow as a district, we realized the best people to provide professional development were our very own professionals in our buildings. We understood the value of learning from one another.”

—Doug Gee, superintendent, Clear Lake Community School District, Iowa

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

grade-specific expectations, and training staff on formative assessment. This was amplified with the assistance of Luis F. Cruz, who came to Clear Lake for two days to work with their entire staff to establish their purpose and a clear understanding of their role in the culture and climate of their building.

As their plans came to fruition, so came the pandemic, and as a result of the previous years of PLC work, Clear Lake CSD managed to get through the school year with as little disruption as possible. Now, as they continue their journey, they are ready to double down on their huge successes.

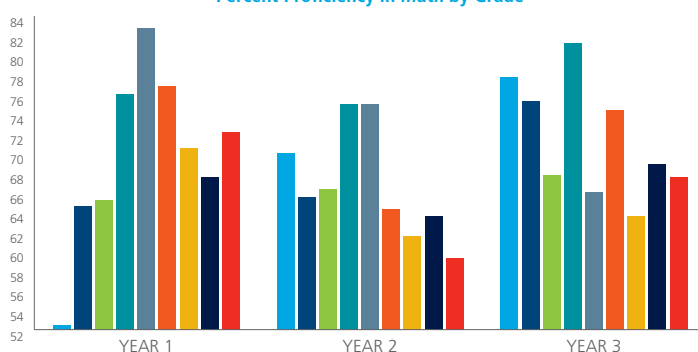
► RESULTS

Clear Lake CSD started the third school year with key elements in place to accelerate learning. Their PLC journey has been a huge success for the district and the staff are all on the same page of understanding the “why” and the process.

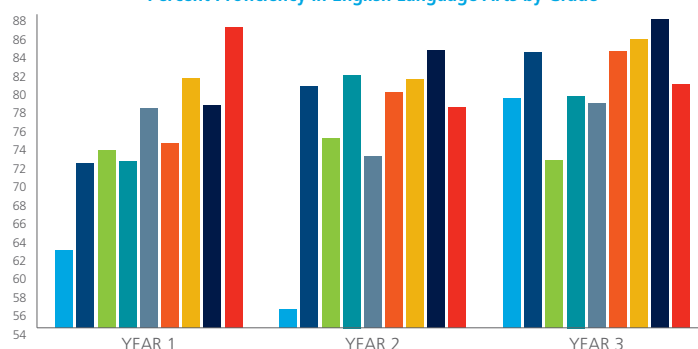
Noteworthy achievements include:

- › First-grade Fall FAST (Reading Fluency) improved from 63% in year prior to 85% in Year 1.
- › Fifth-grade Fall FAST (Reading Fluency) improved from 71% to 77% in the same time frame.
- › Composite ACT results went from 21.7 to 23.3 in just two years.
- › Graduation rate for free/reduced lunch students increased from 89.8% in year prior to 92.6% in Year 1.

Percent Proficiency in Math by Grade



Percent Proficiency in English Language Arts by Grade



3rd Grade 4th Grade 5th Grade
6th Grade 7th Grade 8th Grade
9th Grade 10th Grade 11th Grade

Southeast Polk Community School District

PLEASANT HILL, IOWA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **7,141** students
- › **28.5%** free and reduced lunch
- › **2.5%** English learners
- › **9.8%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **81%** White
- › **7%** Hispanic
- › **5%** Black
- › **5%** Multiracial
- › **2%** Asian
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Southeast Polk Community School District is a community of communities. Located in the vibrant metro area of Des Moines, Iowa, the district serves over 7,000 preK–12 students and is the 13th largest public school district in Iowa. The district covers 114 square miles and serves multiple communities. Southeast Polk consists of one high school, one junior high school, one sixth-grade center, and eight elementary schools.



► CHALLENGE

Southeast Polk Community School District is a unique district in that it serves several towns with a wide range of and socioeconomic diversity. Dr. Jo Ellen Latham, director of curriculum and instruction, considers this both an asset and a challenge. Dr. Latham shared that the most important thing to the committed educators throughout this district is to make sure each and every student, no matter where they live or what their challenges may be, have equitable access to quality curriculum and instruction and receive the right support to help them grow and succeed. To support staff in this work, district leadership chose to implement the Professional Learning Communities at Work® process.

► IMPLEMENTATION

At first, only staff from one or two schools attended a PLC at Work Institute. Although they found the training meaningful, there was no immediate push to scale the work districtwide.

Four years later, Southeast Polk really dug into the work of implementation as a district, and this is when the correlation between PLC implementation and student achievement became noticeable. The schools that really made strides in becoming a high-functioning PLC showed higher levels of student success. According to Dr. Latham, this correlation has remained consistent, even during the disruption caused by COVID-19 and the district's continued recovery.

Southeast Polk began their process by clearly articulating what they wanted all students to know and be able to do. Starting with math and reading, leadership brought K–12 teams together to reach consensus on how they would make decisions about priority and supporting standards. As each grade level prioritized standards, vertical conversations were taking place to look for gaps and repetition in learning progressions.

After identifying priority and supporting standards at the K–12 level, teams in each grade bundled the standards into units of study. The next step was to create assessments designed to measure the priority standards for each unit. These were written in a pre/post-test format, with a data management system in place to efficiently provide information for teams as well as study trends and patterns at the system level. This same protocol was applied to develop curriculum for science, social studies, business, and world language classes.

Leadership continued to invest in professional learning to support their staff, sending teams from each school to PLC at Work Institutes. "The response to this first institute was tremendous, and we quickly realized how this ongoing training would positively impact our

“Implementing PLC at Work districtwide definitely helped us through the pandemic. Having our collaborative teams in place held us together. Our process and our focus kept us anchored, and our work as a PLC will sustain us as we continue recovery.”

—Dr. Jo Ellen Latham, director of curriculum and instruction, Southeast Polk Community School District, Iowa

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

implementation and further advance the work to support gains in student achievement,” recalled Dr. Latham. District leadership also purchased Global PD Teams to strengthen their learning and participate in job-embedded professional development.

As teams studied their data, trends and patterns emerged. Stronger core instruction meant that teachers were able to better target the needs of students who were not yet meeting the standards. When teams from different buildings realized success on certain standards, they shared instructional strategies that had the most impact on student learning. Vertical teams further articulated pathways for learning and growth across grade levels. This led to the development of a multitiered system of supports. Teacher teams identified students who needed intervention or enrichment and collaborated on high-yield strategies to target the needs of individuals and small groups of students.

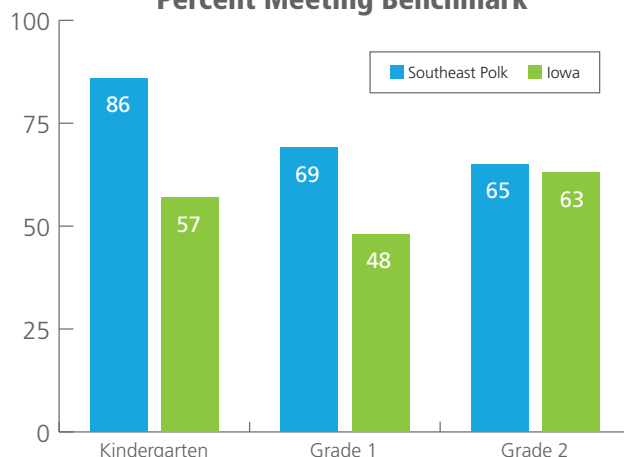
► RESULTS

Mitchellville Elementary School serves a large population of students who qualify for free and reduced fees. It is also now a Blue Ribbon School. After hearing Maria Nielsen share the 15-Day Challenge at a PLC at Work Institute, the school rose to become the number one elementary school in the state based on state performance profiles. The district now plans to scale up the 15-Day Challenge, which requires teachers to focus on the four critical questions of a PLC as they plan their units of study, to other schools across the district.

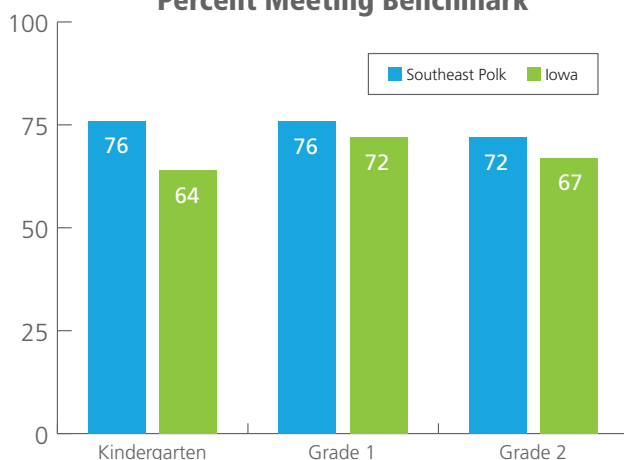
Other noteworthy achievements:

- › All elementary data points on statewide summative assessments exceeded the state average in the past school year, indicating signs of a rebound from disrupted learning.
- › Grades 6–8 exceeded the state average in measures of English language arts, math, and science.
- › The achievement gap in seventh- and eighth-grade math for students receiving free and reduced lunch narrowed by 14%.
- › Eighth-grade English language arts has shown three years of continuous growth in achievement.
- › Student participation in the Advanced Placement (AP) exam increased by 5%.
- › The AP exam passing rate was 85% compared to 61% for the state of Iowa and 58% at the nationwide level.

Early Literacy Data
Percent Meeting Benchmark



Early Math Data
Percent Meeting Benchmark



Montezuma Community Schools

MONTEZUMA, IOWA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **539** students
- › **33.2%** free and reduced lunch
- › **9.8%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **1.5%** Hispanic
- › **0.7%** Multiracial
- › **0.4%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.4%** Black
- › **0.2%** Asian

Montezuma Community Schools is located in Montezuma, Iowa, the seat of Poweshiek County, in the southeastern part of the state. A rural district, Montezuma is comprised of one elementary school building and one secondary school building. It is the smallest district, and the only district with student enrollment under 1,500, to be recognized as a Model PLC at Work® district on AllThingsPLC.info.



► CHALLENGE

The leadership at Montezuma Community Schools established collaborative teams as a part of their Iowa Core Curriculum implementation plan. Before the school year was over, **staff realized the power of collaboration to influence the culture, climate, and practice of teaching and to improve student results.** Teachers began to ask for more school-day time to collaborate, as well as a more comprehensive process.

The summer following this discovery, Montezuma leadership sent a group of administrators and staff to a Solution Tree PLC at Work Institute. "Teachers who attended stated it was one of the most powerful professional events they had experienced," recalls superintendent Dave Versteeg. **"The PLC process gave us a vision of what collaboration is and how to get there."**

The driving force for implementing the PLC at Work process in Montezuma was the determination to improve formative and summative results. Previously, district-level summative results had been inconsistent over time and weren't keeping up with a growth trend line. Classroom formative results did not align with grade-level standards. "We knew that staff and students were working hard at improving achievement, but the results just weren't there," says Versteeg. "The PLC at Work Institute showed us that there were better ways to work at improving our results, and it all starts with how we work together."

► IMPLEMENTATION

After the PLC at Work Institute, Montezuma had a core group of teachers ready to lead with complete administrative support. Some staff were not initially prepared or convinced that collaborating with others about the four critical questions of a PLC was the best use of their time, but plodded ahead anyway. The administration set the expectation that teachers were going to collaborate and that they were going to collaborate in a certain way. However, the teachers had quite a bit of autonomy in determining what the collaboration looked like and how it actually worked.

At the elementary level, teams were created by combining classes and grade levels (for example, K-1, 2-3, 4-6), with teachers from special education, Title I, and talented and gifted mixed into each group. Teams also had the ability to switch their schedules to create groups that made sense to them. At the secondary level, teams were



Our advice to a school just beginning this journey is get started. Don't wait, don't just dabble in the process; jump in and get started. Use resources from Solution Tree and others to define the right work and what to do, but get started."

—Dave Versteeg, superintendent, Montezuma Community Schools, Iowa

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

organized around content, with special education teachers included with math and English groups. Building leaders then developed innovative scheduling that allowed teams time to collaborate.

The administrative team also began to follow established meeting norms and develop quarterly SMART goals.

► RESULTS

Montezuma Community Schools has been featured by Area Education Agency (AEA) 267 in a series of professional development videos on how to get started as a PLC. In addition, Montezuma High School was recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* at the bronze level of Best High Schools in Iowa during their third year of implementing the PLC at Work process.

Internally, Montezuma Community Schools uses the NWEA MAP end-of-year grade-level expectation for goal setting and overall school improvement results. The long-term district goal is for 100% of students to reach end-of-year expectations in reading, math, and science every year. The current annual target goal is 75% of students meeting end-of-year expectations in reading, math, and science. Once this has been achieved, the percentage goal will be ratcheted up until the long-term goal is reached.

In the spring of Year 1

1 of 12 grades met the target goal in math
2 of 12 grades met the target goal in reading
2 of 9 grades met the target goal in science

In the spring of Year 2

1 of 12 grades met the target goal in math
4 of 12 grades met the target goal in reading
3 of 9 grades met the target goal in science

In the spring of Year 3

6 of 12 grades met the target goal in math
8 of 12 grades met the target goal in reading
5 of 9 grades met the target goal in science

Number of grades to meet target goal



Sanger Unified School District

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **21** schools
- › **11,360** students
- › **65.9%** free and reduced lunch
- › **16.2%** English learners

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **69.9%** Hispanic
- › **12.9%** White
- › **11.3%** Asian
- › **4.4%** Multiracial
- › **1.2%** Black
- › **0.2%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.2%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Sanger Unified School District is located in Fresno County, California, 13 miles east-southeast of Fresno.



**PLC AT WORK®
MODEL SCHOOL**

► CHALLENGE

Sanger Unified School District, located in California's Central Valley, is noted for extreme poverty and high numbers of English learners. Prior to implementing the professional learning communities (PLC) process, it was named one of the 98 lowest-performing districts in the state. Staff realized that too much focus was placed on teaching in isolation and that they needed to shift to a collaborative focus on student learning. Building systemwide professional learning communities provided a solid foundation for reaching success on multiple school improvement initiatives.

Shifting the District Culture

From	To
Professional isolation	Collaboration and shared responsibility
Following the textbook	Diagnosing student learning needs
Principals as managers	Principals as leaders of adult learning
Top-down mandates and compliance	Reciprocal accountability

David & Talbert, 2013

► IMPLEMENTATION

Sanger district leaders launched the PLC initiative after attending a professional development session offered by Richard and Rebecca DuFour. They succeeded in creating a collaborative teaching culture by making this a top, sustained priority, and Sanger has since been celebrated as an exemplar of a districtwide PLC in articles by experts such as Jane L. David, Joan E. Talbert, Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek. "In our journey of improvement, one of the best resources we have been able to turn to for support has been our partners at Solution Tree," says former superintendent Marc Johnson.

“The foundation of collaboration that Sanger has built over the last 10 years is what has prepared us to engage in the deeper conversations related to Common Core. Our conversations will continue to revolve around what we want students to learn, how will we know they learned it, how will we respond when learning has already taken place, and how will we respond when learning has not occurred.”

—Matt Navo, superintendent, Sanger Unified School District, California

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

On a daily basis, the staff work together to identify critical standards where proficiency is not yet in evidence. Then, they design focused instructional support, identifying successful instructional strategies and developing explicit direct instruction and lesson plans as teams. The success of these efforts is assessed and monitored regularly at the district level and daily at the classroom level. Adjustments are made as needed, with immediate support being provided to students who are not showing mastery. This collaborative effort is supported and sustained by teams of teachers districtwide who share a common vision and goal: “success for our kids!”

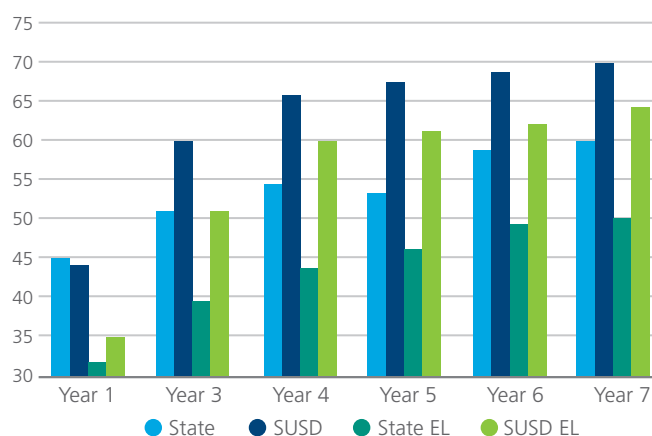
► RESULTS

Sanger became a culture in which collaboration thrived, not just in the initial PLC development, but as a sustained practice that united the district.

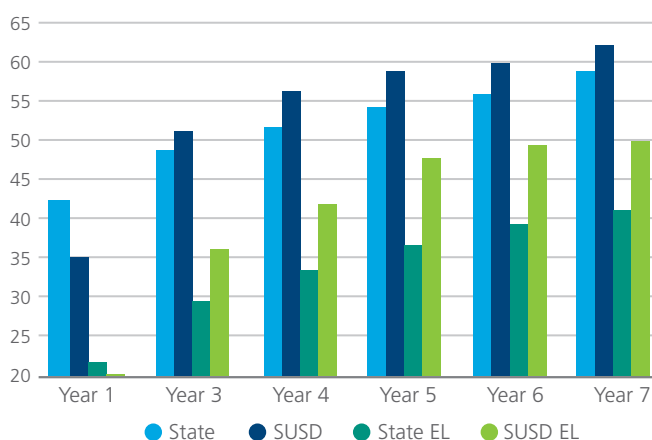
Since the district began implementing the PLC at Work® process, seven schools in the district have moved out of federal improvement status and four achieved state distinguished schools status. Sanger’s test score gains for all students and for English learners have surpassed average state gains each year since testing began under No Child Left Behind. Over the course of seven years, student scores on the California Academic Performance Index (API) increased from 702 to 822. For EL students, the scores increased from 636 to 772.

Sanger seems poised for continued success. “Now more than at any other time in our work, it is important to share the journey with members of a high-functioning collaborative team. Continuing to improve as a professional learning community is the pathway we must walk!” says Johnson.

Percentage of Proficient Students on California State STAR Test—Math



Percentage of Proficient Students on California State STAR Test—ELA



Camden Fairview High School

CAMDEN, ARKANSAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **689** students
- › **100%** free and reduced lunch
- › **2%** English learners
- › **12%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **62%** Black
- › **31%** White
- › **4%** Multiracial
- › **3%** Hispanic
- › **<1%** Asian
- › **<1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Camden Fairview High School is located in Camden, Arkansas, in Ouachita County. The city resides in the south-central part of Arkansas. Home to the Cardinals, CFHS is a part of Camden Fairview School District, serving grades 9–12.



**CAMDEN FAIRVIEW
HIGH SCHOOL**

► CHALLENGE

Long before Cara Bowie became the principal of Camden Fairview High School, she was a teacher and a student at the school. She's been passionate about improving the halls of CFHS ever since. When Bowie took over, she immediately knew what actionable steps were needed.

The teachers at CFHS were isolated, working and operating independently without the structure of a team or methods to lead their students to success. Teachers even gave different student assessments, so learning was evaluated with different measures for each classroom.

Team faculty meetings were not collaborative and many teachers were resistant to change. Bowie knew changing the mindset of her teachers would be the first step in making improvements at CFHS.

► IMPLEMENTATION

When Bowie arrived at CFHS, the school was in its second year of funding from the Arkansas Department of Education Professional Development Project Grant.

Bowie quickly jumped into gear to ensure all teams began collaborating, essential standards were unpacked, and the staff at CFHS became well-versed in the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process. The grant helped the team focus on answering the four critical questions of a PLC.

New and veteran teachers opened up to the change the PLC process provided. Faculty meetings became more productive, allowing teacher teams to form and create discussions about analyzing student data and setting learning goals. Principal Bowie took a hands-on approach to her work with the teachers, attending workshops with them and learning alongside them.

The team at CFHS then shifted their focus toward assessment, analyzing their evaluations, incorporating intervention, and providing enrichment.

Teachers would prioritize a 30-minute intervention block called Cardinal Academy, which allowed them to analyze their data and



When I was a teacher, it felt like we lived on islands of our own. Everyone taught their classroom based on what they enjoyed the most. Now as a principal, I see my teams collaborating and learning best teaching practices from one another, all based on the same essential standards. That's the beauty of the PLC process."

—Cara C. Bowie, principal, Camden Fairview High School, Arkansas

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

then intervene where needed. They kept their focus on the right work through the Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™ process.

"We know that we have to inspect what we expect. And so we're going to be in those intervention classes, trying to make sure that instructions are being delivered and learning is happening for all," Bowie said.

► RESULTS

By the end of Camden Fairview High School's second year under the Arkansas grant, tremendous progress had been made. Teacher collaboration was in full effect and Principal Bowie was able to move learning forward.

When the third year came around, the students and teachers were making strides. The CFHS community was now built on a PLC at Work process. The teachers and administrators at CFHS knew that strong relationships with students were essential for learning. They made sure to get to know each student individually and provide them with the support they needed.

Major improvements:

- Through Cardinal Academy, CFHS's intervention block, English scores improved drastically.
- The school saw high graduation rates, reaching 91% of students with diplomas.
- Readiness in reading scores increased from 12% to 17% after implementation began.

MET READINESS BENCHMARK READING



YEAR 1

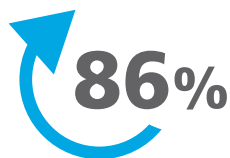


YEAR 2



YEAR 3

GRADUATION SCORE



YEAR 1



YEAR 2



YEAR 3

Bartow County College and Career Academy

CARTERSVILLE, GEORGIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **603** students
- › **56%** free and reduced lunch
- › **2%** English learners
- › **11%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **66%** White
- › **16%** Hispanic
- › **15%** Black
- › **1.6%** Multiracial
- › **0.6** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.6%** Asian
- › **0.2%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

The Bartow County College and Career Academy (BCCCA) is a collaborative venture among the community, K-12 education, post-secondary education, and business and industry to ensure a viable workforce along with continued opportunities for the students of the Bartow County School System.



**MODEL
PLC at WORK®
SCHOOL**

► CHALLENGE

When Dr. Greg Doss, principal and CEO of Bartow County College and Career Academy (BCCCA), answered the call of superintendent Dr. Phillip Page to implement Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® in his school, he soon realized the potential of PLC to help his staff better serve students.

The Academy is a unique learning environment. Upon entering tenth grade, students from each of the three local high schools may elect to attend the Academy for specific career pathway opportunities the school offers. Educators work to ensure that all students graduate with a plan to be enrolled in postsecondary education, enlisted in the military, or employed in local industry.

"I approached this work as an intentional shift," Doss explains. "I saw it as moving from a perspective of teaching to a perspective of learning and from isolation to collaboration, as well as changing the paradigm of results from emphasizing points earned to looking for real evidence of proficiency."

► IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to implementation, leaders from the Academy attended the Solution Tree Culture Keepers Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, with other school leaders during the summer. The following fall, leaders began a study of *Learning by Doing* (DuFour et.al, 2016) and kicked off a process to collaboratively shift school culture.

The first step of implementation in Year 1 was to create a guiding coalition. Members of this coalition crafted new mission and vision statements and created collective commitments. Using *Learning by Doing*, the guiding coalition studied the three big ideas, four guiding questions, and critical vocabulary of the PLC process. These initial leaders helped to lay the foundation for collaborative teams that would begin working together in the fall of Year 2. Guiding coalition members also attended a PLC at Work Institute the following summer to continue their learning.

Among the first orders of action taken by the entire staff were identifying essential standards and working collaboratively to ensure that teacher teams were on the same page as far as standards and assessments. The Academy has the added challenge of coordinating with three base schools in which students spend a good part of their instructional day, so their collaborative process must include cross-systems efforts.

The biggest challenge the Academy has faced during implementation is figuring out collaborative teams for singletons. "After going through several renditions of what common standards would look like for a team consisting of career-oriented teachers of law enforcement,

“I approached this work as an intentional shift—moving from a perspective of teaching to a perspective of learning and from isolation to collaboration.”

—Greg Doss, principal, Bartow County College and Career Academy, Georgia

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

cosmetology, AV tech, engineering, and teaching, we identified one standard—employability skills—on which they could work collaboratively,” says Doss.

The daily work of staff is guided by a living document the Academy calls their PLC Playbook. As educators grow in their knowledge, so does the playbook. They also maintain

healthy progress by taking on new processes, strategies, and practices in small bites. As Doss says, “Less is more.”

The guiding coalition is there every step of the way to ensure staff stay on target with the mission, vision, values, and goals that are foundational to their ever-expanding playbook.

► RESULTS

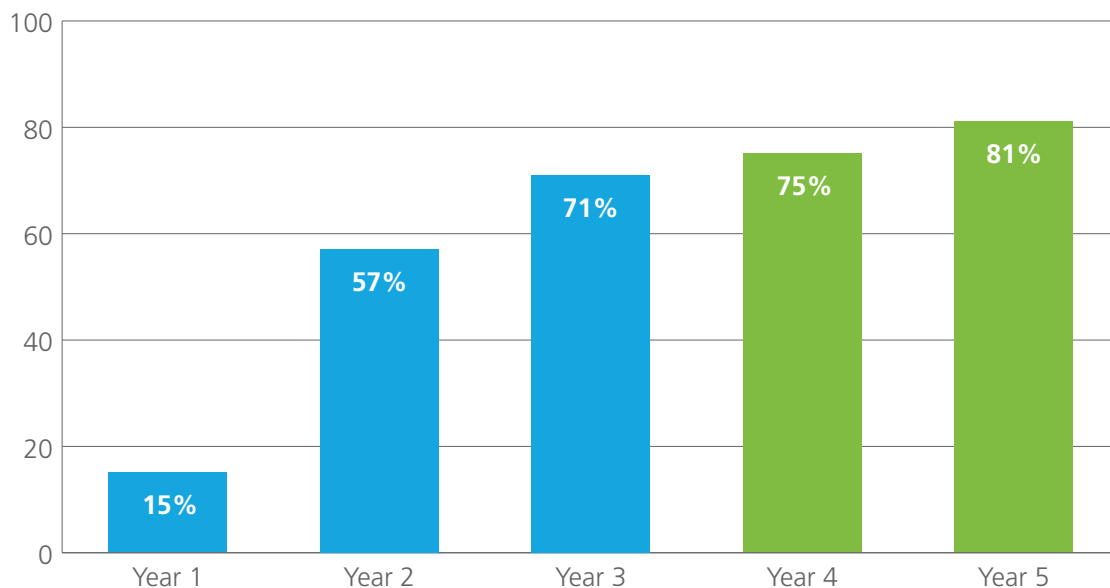
Doss says his health science team in particular is seeing great results from their work with PLC. Even though each teacher has a particular focus in the health care field, together they are able to collaboratively align their assessments vertically as students advance from basic courses to more specialized study and also support one another within the same grade level. For example, if one teacher is stronger at teaching a particular lesson, he or she will take on students from other classes for that specific lesson. All of this is to ensure all students have the best opportunity to learn at the highest level.

As a result of the collaborative work of the Academy’s health science teachers, the student pass rate on the National HealthCareer Association (NHA) exam rose from 15% to 81%. The Academy’s health care results now surpass the national average on the NHA exams.

► OTHER ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS

- › US History team became the first A-Team from the Academy to be recognized by the district and the first US History A-Team districtwide.
- › Health care team recognized as the first Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education A-Team in the district.
- › US History students outperformed the state in Years 3 and 4 of implementation by 5% and 3.5% respectively.

Health Science Student Pass Rates on Certification Exams



Lake Hamilton Junior High

PEARCY, ARKANSAS



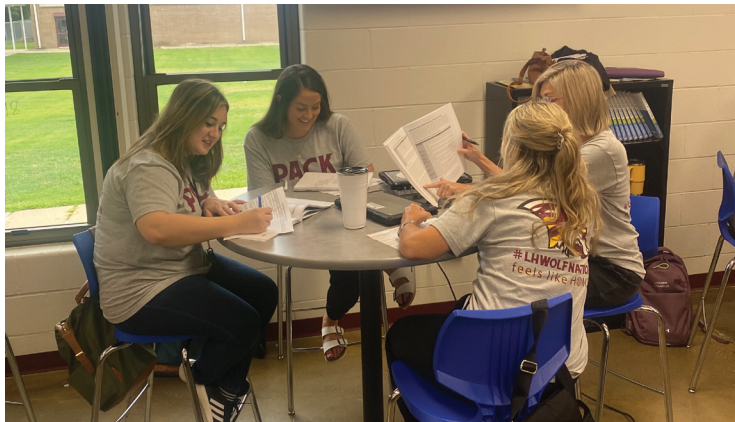
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 678 students
- › 53% free and reduced lunch
- › 4% English learners
- › 9% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 74.2% White
- › 13% Hispanic
- › 8.3% Multiracial
- › 3.7% Black
- › 0.4% Asian
- › 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native

Lake Hamilton Junior High is a part of the larger Lake Hamilton School District, which serves as a K–12 independent school district in Garland County. Lake Hamilton aims to provide an atmosphere where students, parents, educators, and the community work hand-in-hand to empower each learner with knowledge, skills, and direction. Their motto, seen throughout the district, is “One pack. One purpose. Our students’ success!”



► CHALLENGE

Principal Jason Selig of Lake Hamilton Junior High was first exposed to the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process as an elementary school principal. When he arrived at LHJH, he created plans to implement the PLC process so that every eighth- and ninth-grade student who attended LHJH had a place where learning was at the forefront.

As a team, LHJH needed additional support to reach the high levels of success they’ve always aspired to have. Although basic collaborative structures were in place, teacher teams lacked the tools and strategies to effectively review data, analyze results, and focus on the right adjustments that would increase student achievement.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Within Selig’s second year as principal, LHJH applied for and was awarded the Arkansas Department of Education Professional Development Project Grant for Cohort 4.

After gaining this opportunity, LHJH’s first step was to build a guiding coalition made up of key influencers throughout the school, who each represented a department area and who could lead others through the work.

Next, teams began building shared knowledge around the PLC process. LHJH’s guiding coalition and staff began to move from teaching in isolation to a collaborative culture that focused on learning for all students and a collective commitment to create and maintain a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Soon, teams began unwrapping their essential standards into learning targets, developing proficiency scales, common assessments, data protocols, and essential standard unit maps.

“We’re focused on collaborating and learning now more than ever, which we’re excited about because it takes the pressure off, knowing we don’t have to do it alone.”

—Jason Selig, principal, Lake Hamilton Junior High, Arkansas

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

The staff also committed to analyzing student data on a regular basis and designing appropriate interventions and extensions. The PLC process allowed LHJH to create effective grading practices that reflect student learning and place an even more intense focus on learning and interventions kid by kid, skill by skill.

As they dug into best practices of Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™, Lake Hamilton Junior High moved to include a 45-minute block called “Wolftime,” which gave priority days to their English and math teachers. Using common assessment data, teachers selected students to work with during that intervention period based on what skill needed

improvement. It also gave students the opportunity for self-enrollment into enrichment or extension courses.

“When our teachers claim students to help or students claim teachers to help them, we see the hope, excitement, and love that everyone has for learning. Students are finally understanding that they can grow even though they don’t learn at the same pace that someone else does. Our teachers believe . . . that all kids can learn. So it’s taken hold here at the junior high, and we’re excited about that. That’s a different feel and culture when you get to that point,” Selig said.

► RESULTS

In just three years of implementing the PLC at Work process, Lake Hamilton was named a Model PLC at Work school.

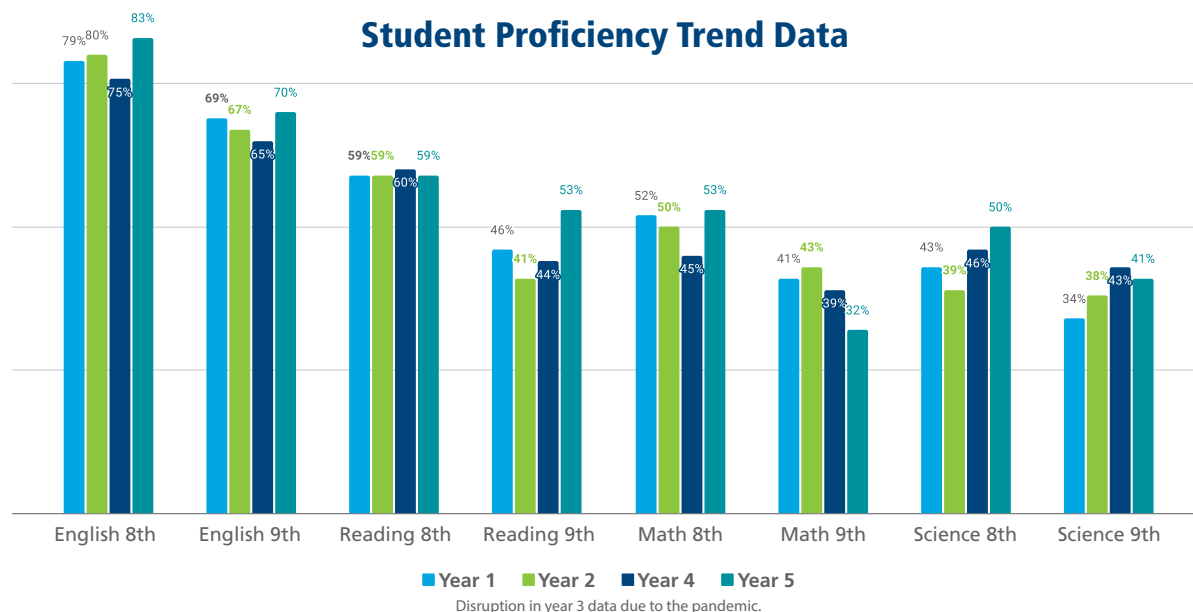
At the beginning of their PLC journey, LHJH found challenges in analyzing the data for students, but now what was once a daunting task has become a streamlined process for their teachers and administrators. They were able to move away from the traditional grading system to a more innovative and standards-based approach, which created accountability for their students to want to learn.

Lake Hamilton Junior High plans to move into a proficiency-based grading system that helps them target student

learning more frequently and respond when they aren’t learning in a timely manner.

► OTHER NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- › Marzano High Reliability Schools Level 1 and 2 certified
- › Solution Tree Highly Effective Schools Accreditation
- › Best Growth Scores in English Language Arts by the University of Arkansas Office for Education Policy



Mason Crest Elementary

ANNANDALE, VIRGINIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **572** students
- › **72%** free and reduced lunch
- › **19%** English learners
- › **10%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **79.6%** Hispanic
- › **13.1%** Asian
- › **3.3%** White
- › **1%** Black
- › **0.5%** Multiracial
- › **0.3%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **2.1%** Other

Mason Crest Elementary, part of Fairfax County Public Schools, is located in Annandale, Virginia, a community of approximately 41,000 residents.



► CHALLENGE

Mason Crest Elementary's journey with Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® began during its first year in operation as a school. When the administrative team started at Mason Crest, their minds were piqued by research that proved schools worked best when committed to a professional learning community.

The administration knew early that working together would be a critical part of realizing the staff's mission of ensuring high levels of learning for all.

A clear focus and building a culture of collaboration would also be essential to meeting this goal. Mason Crest also sought to monitor student data, developing plans to collectively move forward with each individual child's education.

"At the beginning, we asked how we could lay that groundwork," co-principal Sherry Shin said. "How could we fulfill that process?"

► IMPLEMENTATION

Mason Crest's administrators chose a PLC path after attending a retreat with Dr. Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour. Each teacher on staff received a copy of *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work®*.

The staff grew together quickly, for example in the last work week before classes, when teachers studied individual chapters of *Learning by Doing*, then shared important lessons and findings with their colleagues in a collaborative environment. All prospective candidates for staff openings at Mason Crest were also given a document laying out the PLC's expectations—integrating all new teachers into the professional learning community from day one.

"We have to return and be committed to [the PLC] on an annual basis," co-principal Andrew Pratt said. "Even with one new member, we always have a brand-new team."

“Teachers will feel relief [in a PLC]. If you were working in isolation by yourself, it may feel like an uphill battle that you cannot win, that you cannot meet all these children’s needs on your own.”

—Sherry Shin, co-principal, Mason Crest Elementary, Virginia

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Mason Crest also embraced the PLC at Work model to build specific structures into the school’s master schedule early on, securing uninterrupted time for teams to work together. Teacher roles in the PLC were determined by student needs, such as their learning, behavioral, and English language development needs.

“We’ve made this commitment towards providing high levels of learning for all students,” Pratt said. “We’re always going to be willing to come together and have that conversation . . . It’s essential for our students’ needs.”

► RESULTS

Through the PLC at Work process, Mason Crest created and maintained the successful culture of collaboration it desired as a new school.

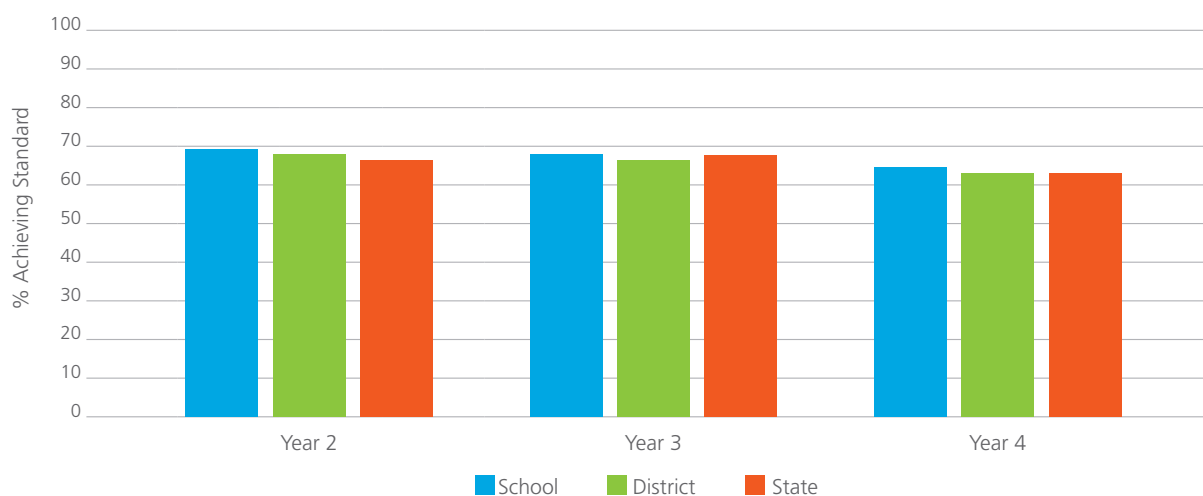
In Year 1, Mason Crest’s test scores exceeded the Commonwealth of Virginia’s accreditation benchmarks in all four subject categories: English, math, history, and science. Test scores continued to grow or hold steady in the second and third years of PLC involvement. Within two years, English and science passing percentages had each increased by at least 7%, and Mason Crest was beating the commonwealth’s passing rates by 5% to 16%, depending on the subject.

By Year 4, Mason Crest was recognized as a National Title I Distinguished School, as well as the first recipient of the DuFour Award.

The school’s model success has also drawn more than 300 site visits from educators and school teams since starting its PLC journey, with some visitors coming from as far away as Taiwan and Australia to study Mason Crest’s PLC.

“Every year, we’re trying to think how we can get better and go deeper,” Shin said. “Now we’re able to see that in action, and we provide the staff opportunities to learn from each other, and we’re seeing the power in that.”

Reading Performance: Economically Disadvantaged



Minnieville Elementary School

WOODBIDGE, VIRGINIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 540 students
- › 71% free and reduced lunch
- › 65% English learners
- › 11% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 48% Hispanic
- › 27% Black
- › 12% White
- › 6% Asian
- › 4% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › 3% Multiracial

Minnieville Elementary School is part of Prince William County Public Schools located in Woodbridge, Virginia, a community of approximately 54,275 residents.



Minnieville students embrace diversity.

► CHALLENGE

When Nathaniel Provencio became principal at Minnieville Elementary, a school that had served the Woodbridge, Virginia community for more than 40 years, several large challenges awaited him and his staff. In addition to serving a highly diverse, academically challenging, high second-language-learner population, Minnieville would also have to adapt to changing benchmark mandates and assessments from the state.

“We were thrown into a situation where every reason not to be successful was there, whether it be poverty, immigrant families, or a disengaged community,” Provencio said. “We had to do something, because a program alone would not fix it.”

Provencio found direction in a book left by a former principal, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work®*, which detailed how a professional learning communities (PLC) framework could establish effective teaching methods, curriculum development, and assessment strategies specific to his district.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Minnieville’s PLC process took off after Provencio took his leadership team to Richmond, Virginia, for a PLC at Work Institute with Dr. Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour. The program inspired his staff to form a PLC, working to ensure that every student at Minnieville was provided the best first instruction each and every day.

“Keeping things simple, systematic, and doing the right work has really been huge for us. We’ve learned that we cannot be successful without a highly engaged community.”

—Nathaniel Provencio, principal, Minnieville Elementary School, Virginia

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Minnieville’s PLC framework took shape with a system of tiered interventions for both academic and behavioral concerns. Teachers were assembled into teams at each grade level, then empowered to utilize the PLC process by setting norms, identifying goals, and creating and sharing resources. Together, the staff collectively shared ownership over all student successes and challenges. Minnieville’s educators also collaborated on creative scheduling to ensure daily time for implementing tiered interventions.

Parents and families were also invited to participate in the PLC process, strengthening the relationship of the entire learning community. Minnieville provided those families who were new to the United States classes about the American education system, as well as English courses through a language learning company.

Provencio says that these families, who are not accustomed to having a direct relationship with their school, now have a sense of pride in working with Minnieville.

“We need the parents’ input, because we need to make sure parents grow with us,” Provencio said. “Students come and go, but their parents will stay with them.”

► RESULTS

Provencio says the PLC processes at Minnieville have paid off greatly, allowing the school to continuously raise student achievement while addressing the specific needs of its diverse learning community.

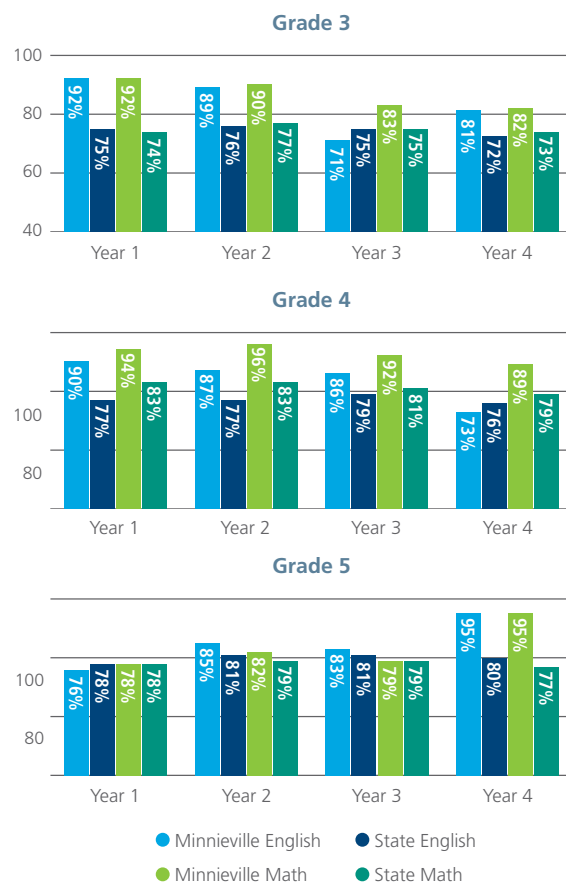
Today, Minnieville students boast a 96% passing rate in both language arts and mathematics. Approximately 20% to 25% of its K–5 students receive gifted education or advanced lessons. And when as few as 2% of kindergarteners arriving at Minnieville have attended any preschool—and thus, have no reading readiness—Provencio says the PLC process and focus

on formative assessment ensures that 90% to 100% of them are ready for first-grade literacy by the end of their first school year.

After establishing its PLC framework, Minnieville also became the highest-performing Title 1 school in Prince William County, as well as the eleventh-highest-performing school out of the county’s 67 schools. For the entire commonwealth, Minnieville ranked 184th out of 1,097 schools.

“Keeping things simple, systematic, and doing the right work has really been huge for us,” Provencio said. “We’ve learned that we cannot be successful without a highly engaged community.”

Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding Proficiency



Fern Creek High School

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



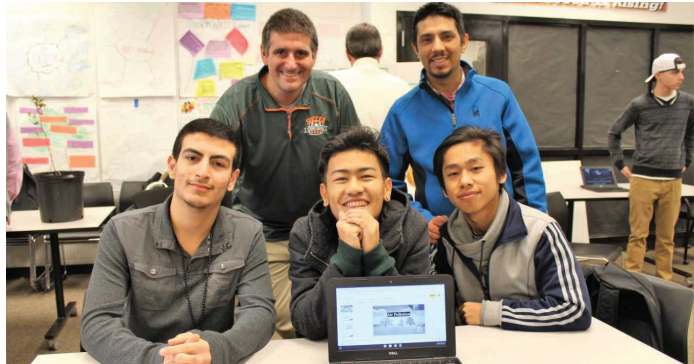
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **1,599** students
- › **70%** free and reduced lunch
- › **7%** English learners
- › **12%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **46.2%** White
- › **36.3%** Black
- › **10.3%** Hispanic
- › **4.1%** Asian
- › **2%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **1%** Multiracial
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Fern Creek High School is a communication and media arts school located in Louisville, Kentucky, and is part of Jefferson County Public Schools.



Fern Creek High School students are proud of their achievements.

► CHALLENGE

When newspaper headlines detailed Fern Creek High School's low test scores—a “hit in the gut” falling within the state's bottom 10% of schools—former principal Nathan Meyer knew that his staff would need to become more accountable for student success. The school, labeled as Persistently Low Achieving by the state, also faced a regular six-week testing cycle of formative and summative assessments from the Jefferson County Public Schools district administration. Meyer sought change for his school through collaborative professional learning community (PLC) meetings and RTI plans to address Fern Creek's sinking statistics, as well as to meet the school district's regular testing challenges.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Fern Creek responded with professional collaboration based around Dr. Richard DuFour's work with professional learning communities. Using a standards-based approach, teachers administered formative assessments, analyzed common data, and designed interventions based on a tiered system of student needs. Teachers met in content-specific PLCs every Tuesday from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., working together in designated time to build quality lessons that supported student learning, as well as to make adjustments and plan for the district's next six-week summative assessment. Teachers also used a common language to guide instruction, providing transparency and a fixed point of reference for all.

“If you talk to our kids, universally, they’ll say something like ‘my teacher really cares about me.’ And that comes from our commitment that ‘all means all,’ and that failure is not an option.”

—Dr. Rebecca Nicolas, principal, Fern Creek High School, Kentucky

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Staff also used formative assessments to inform instruction and share experiences with their fellow PLC members. Common data was shared and analyzed in a search for trends, helping ascertain strategies that worked successfully and strategies that did not, as well as next steps for instruction. Teachers also intervened

with struggling students to offer support and recovery based on individual needs. Some were provided alternate ways to show competency, such as through in-class Tier 2 response to intervention (RTI) support or academic advising.

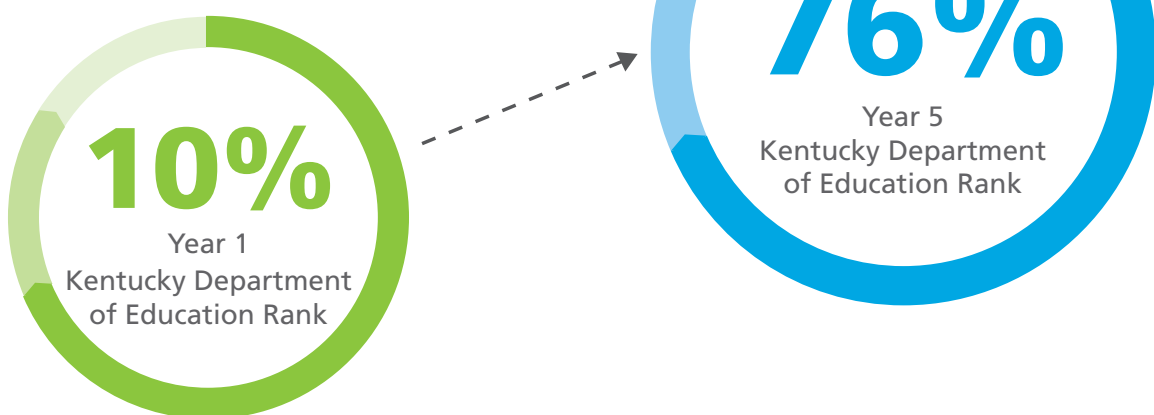
► RESULTS

Fern Creek’s commitment to the PLC at Work® and RTI at Work™ processes paid off significantly: the school increased its testing rate from the state’s bottom 10% to the 76th percentile of all Kentucky schools within five years. During a 2015 visit, former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan commended Fern Creek for its “dramatic academic transformation” in that span. The school also shed its “persistently low achievement” label in the process.

Fern Creek was also one of five schools nationally to receive the School Change and Innovation Award from the National Principals Leadership Institute. Fern Creek also began graduating students 9% higher than the district average, and Advanced Placement students

earning qualifying scores and college credit on their AP exams had increased by 34% from the previous year.

“Perhaps the statistic of which Fern Creek is most proud is the fact that we have continued to show gains in our Achievement and Gap (at risk) scores despite our increasingly challenging population,” former principal Nathan Meyer said. “The percentage of our students with disabilities, our English language learners, our free/reduced lunch status, and our minority population has increased over the last five years. Our teachers’ dedication to recovery and professional collaboration has allowed us to realize gains despite the challenges some of these students face in achieving proficiency.”



Esther Starkman School

EDMONTON, ALBERTA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 935 students
- › 14% English learners
- › 3% special education

Esther Starkman School is located in Edmonton, Alberta, a city of approximately 981,000 residents.



► CHALLENGE

With grades K–9 under a single roof, Principal Greg Kushnir and his staff at Esther Starkman School faced teaching challenges that were as diverse as the learners themselves.

Esther Starkman strived to close the achievement gap among its students by ensuring that those who struggled received the support they needed. And with 14% of his learners facing challenges with English as a second language across ten separate grades, Kushnir sought consistent, fair, and equitable assessment policies in each classroom throughout the school.

“We believe strongly that it is impossible to effectively monitor student learning unless every teacher is crystal-clear about what they want their students to learn,” Kushnir said.

Kushnir and Esther Starkman looked to the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work® process as a way to better meet the needs of students through effective, research-based teaching strategies.

“We want our students to think, solve problems, and apply the knowledge they learn so they are exceptionally well-prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world,” Kushnir said.

► IMPLEMENTATION

The educators at Esther Starkman began by taking collective responsibility for the success of each student.

“It is the results of our efforts that we are concerned with,” Kushnir said. “If we are not getting the results in student achievement that we are expecting, then we will change our actions to get different results.”



We are not an isolated collection of teachers under one roof. Rather, we are a team that works interdependently to achieve common goals.”

—Greg Kushnir, principal, Esther Starkman School, Edmonton, Alberta

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Through the PLC at Work process, Esther Starkman’s teachers collaborated to create common performative and summative assessments with agreed-upon standards. They performed data analysis on these assessments and started providing daily systemic intervention, determined by the student and their individual skill level.

To match the students’ diverse needs at each grade level, collaborative teams of teachers from kindergarten to grade 9 created a shared understanding regarding

which curricular outcomes were essential for all of their students to learn.

Additionally, the teams vertically aligned their outcomes to ensure that no gaps, overlaps, or omissions would impact student success. And in turn, the strategies are subject to a yearly review, where they are retained or discarded based on their effectiveness.

“We believe that a collective, systemic approach to at-risk students will allow us to succeed where a traditional individual approach has not,” Kushnir said.

► RESULTS

The PLC at Work process has dynamically helped Esther Starkman’s educators improve their instructional practices, allowing them to create a diverse and rewarding classroom experience.

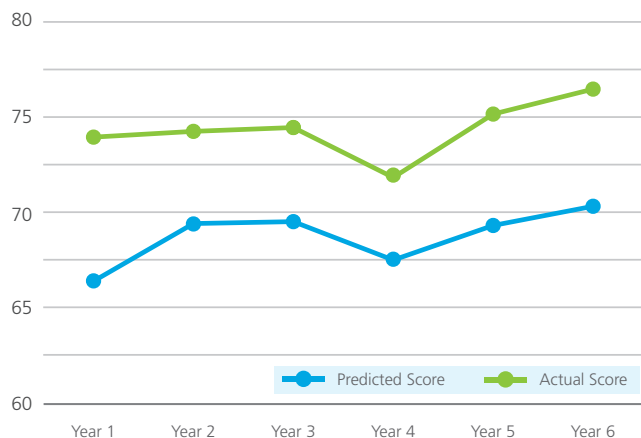
“By collaborating both within the school and within our district, teachers have been able to learn, agree upon, and implement effective instructional strategies,” Kushnir said.

The data illustrates the school’s success with the process as well. For example, Esther Starkman outperformed

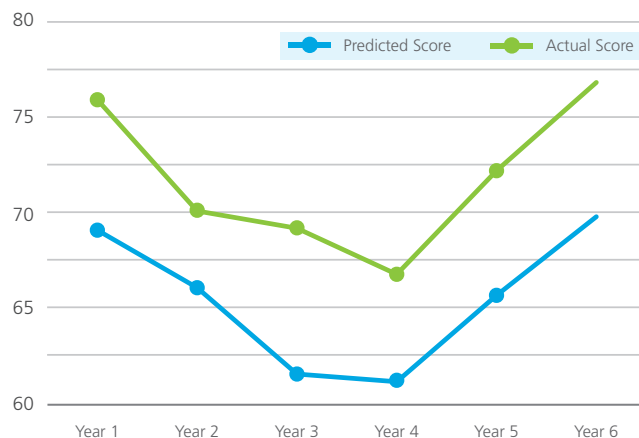
the provincial averages in grade 6 English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies—both at the acceptable standard, as well as the standard of excellence—for seven consecutive years.

“Student learning, not adult comfort, drives the actions at our school,” Kushnir said. “We hope that all experiences at Esther Starkman are rewarding and will cause you to believe, as we do, that this is truly a school of excellence.”

**Grade 6 English Language Arts
Predicted vs. Actual Score on PAT**



**Grade 6 Math Predicted vs.
Actual Score on PAT**



Woodlawn Middle School

LONG GROVE, ILLINOIS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 648 students
- › 3.4% English learners
- › 8% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 55.5% White
- › 25.6% Asian
- › 13% Hispanic
- › 4.1% Multiracial
- › 2.3% Black

Woodlawn Middle School, part of Kildeer Countryside School District 96, is located in Long Grove, Illinois, a community of approximately 8,000 residents.



Woodlawn educators are laser focused on the success of every learner.

► CHALLENGE

Woodlawn Middle School's professional learning community (PLC) journey began more than 15 years ago, when it sought to develop common formative and benchmark assessments in order to increase student learning. At that point, standardized tests were the only primary sources driving instruction or increasing student achievement at the school.

Principal Greg Grana, who has served Woodlawn for more than a decade, knew a professional learning community could simultaneously prepare students to reach local testing benchmarks and foster a more collaborative staff, even if some teachers weren't immediately on board with the PLC framework.

"The biggest challenges we faced were getting past the 'why,'" Grana said. "'Why do we have to do this?' It took a while, but you hit a certain point, and the questions go from 'why' to 'how.' And that's huge. That's a monumental shift in thinking . . . When you start hearing talk like that among your staff, that's how you know you're in good shape."

► IMPLEMENTATION

Kildeer Countryside School District 96 started the PLC journey for Woodlawn as the entire district adapted the



We talk to people from around the world, the country, Canada, Australia—they come and witness what we do and how we do it, and they're blown away by how everyone speaks the language ... The system works so unbelievably well."

—Greg Grana, principal, Woodlawn Middle School, Illinois

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

framework at once. Woodlawn set off by evaluating its student achievement data and focusing on the best practices needed to improve student performance.

Grana said the teachers collectively made a commitment to own responsibility for student successes, and to hold the same rigorous expectations for every child in the school system.

As the PLC began to develop, practice quickly moved into action. Woodlawn's staff shifted into a growth

mindset, as knowledge shared among its professionals allowed the PLC's principles to drive the school's daily functioning. District content teams worked to develop a common set of targets for each grade and subject. Teams also met regularly to review data to design effective differentiated instruction. In short, focusing on the four critical questions of a PLC ensured a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all of Woodlawn's students.

► RESULTS

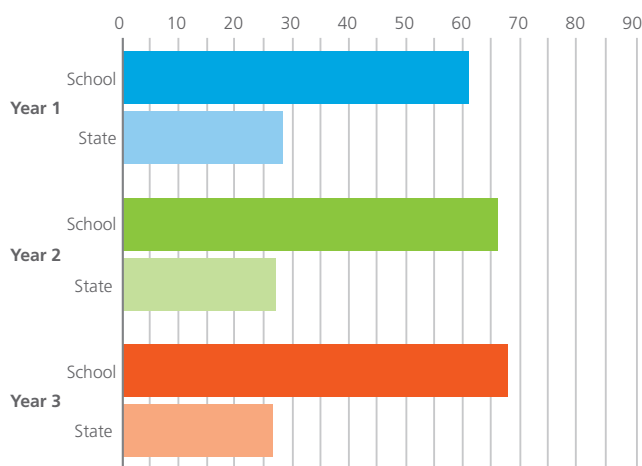
In addition to winning the coveted DuFour Award, Woodlawn was also twice named a United States Department of Education Blue Ribbon School in recognition of its students' strong achievement after embracing the PLC framework.

Grana said Woodlawn has enjoyed "incredibly high" standardized test scores and that the interdependence between content and grade team members has grown exponentially.

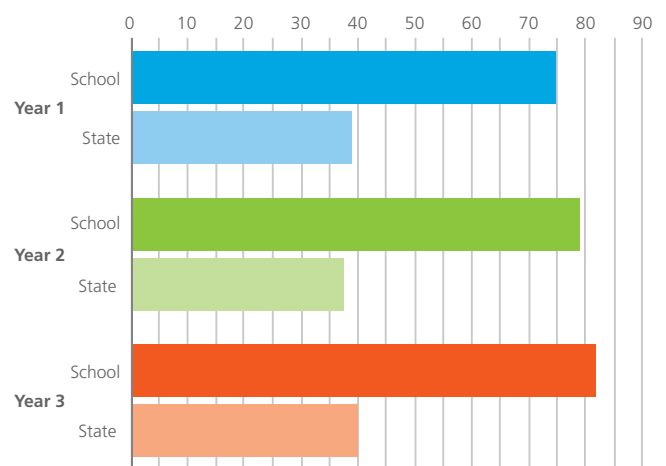
Students and families are also provided feedback through a standards-based reporting system, allowing all parties to monitor a learner's classroom progress. Also, students are able to seek help from Woodlawn's most skilled professionals during an established "flex" period, ensuring that learners with the greatest areas of need can receive individualized teaching or coaching.

"We have been a fully immersed professional learning community," Grana said. "That means everything that we do, we do under the PLC umbrella."

Percentage of Seventh Graders Passing PARCC Math



Percentage of Seventh Graders Passing PARCC Reading



Golden Hills Elementary School

BUTTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 263 students
- › 79% free and reduced lunch
- › 13% English learners
- › 9% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 46% White
- › 32% Hispanic
- › 11% Multiracial
- › 5% American Indian or Alaska Native
- › 2% Asian
- › 1% Black

Golden Hills Elementary School is a public school serving fourth and fifth grade in Butte County, California. Butte County comprises the Chico, California, metropolitan statistical area.



► CHALLENGE

The professional learning community (PLC) journey began at Golden Hills Elementary School more than six years ago. Due to multiple natural disasters during those years, including fires and a citywide evacuation from a possible dam leak, Golden Hills's fourth and fifth graders had rarely seen a full year of school. Their current system of operation was failing more than 70% of their students. Out of the fourth-grade students who entered Golden Hills, only 4% were at grade level.

"We haven't had a normal school year in years because we've missed school from either natural disasters or the pandemic. Our students had a lot of holes that we wanted to address right when they came in and not just hope that we were getting it. We wanted to make sure we were targeting what we need them to know," said principal Kristi Napoli.

Before the pandemic, Golden Hills had PLC practices in place, but Napoli realized they were really only practicing "PLC lite." Many of their educators were not trained in the model, and shortly after they began incorporating PLC into their system, their school like the rest of the world switched to a virtual/hybrid setting, creating new struggles for their teachers.

Napoli wanted better for their students and for the educators at Golden Hills Elementary School.

“I really wanted to dive back into the PLC process, because I know it works. It was time to eliminate excuses and become high-performing collaborative teams with a focus on student learning...”

—Kristi Napoli, principal, Golden Hills Elementary School, California

► IMPLEMENTATION

Golden Hills Elementary School switched its focus to the four critical PLC questions in all areas: academics, behavior, and social-emotional needs. Teachers began targeting the instruction of the essential standards in homeroom classes and holding all students to high expectations. All students would receive instruction and have the same opportunity (and expectations) to learn grade-level essential standards. Common formative assessments were developed and given to students to assess their understanding.

When funding permitted, the campus brought in PLC coach Anthony Muhammad, who propelled the team forward. His expertise helped the team collaborate to design common formative assessments and analyze data to develop timely targeted interventions and extensions.

“Having researched and planned intervention into our daily schedule, we were ready to address our students’ individual needs through a multitiered system of supports. We knew we didn’t have time to waste because we only had them for two years. So we really wanted to spend our time ensuring

they learned what we needed them to learn before they left us,” reflected Napoli.

Golden Hills also developed two daily 35-minute intervention blocks to provide timely, targeted interventions in math and English language arts. During this time, students receive instruction in the area focused on their individual needs; this is done through re-teaching or through the extension of the standard. The team became creative in their schedule to allow students to get the support they needed while not missing new essential content.

Golden Hills is a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports school (PBIS). They’ve implemented monthly PBIS meetings where they evaluate school data and look at areas of concern and needs for behavioral reminders or re-teaching.

“It was switching our mindset and getting the staff to realize it’s not just PLC time on Friday afternoon . . . We are PLC all the time,” Napoli explained.

► RESULTS

Over the last three to four years, Golden Hills Elementary School has gone from a place with high disciplinary referrals and below-average grade levels to one where student success and well-being are the primary focus.

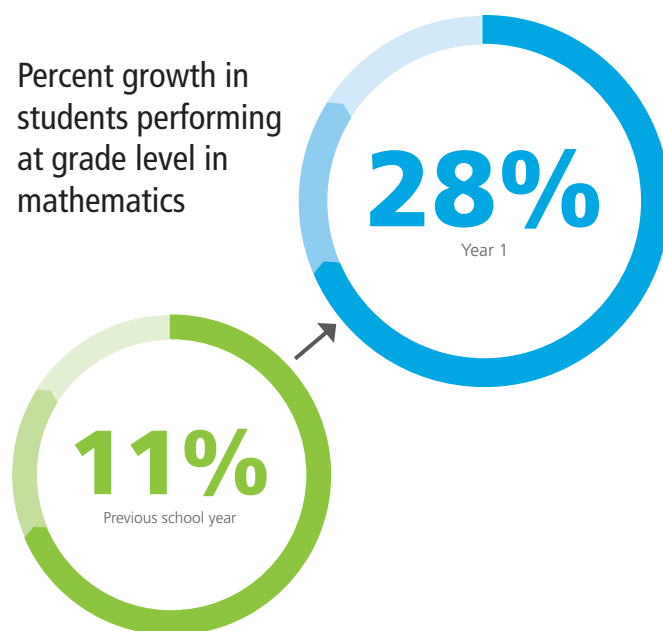
Using the PLC process, Golden Hills doubled its percentage of growth in math. Their numbers went from an 11% growth of students being on grade level to a 28% growth rate of students being on grade level in the first year of implementation.

On the behavioral side, Golden Hills student referrals also decreased by 50% over Year 1.

“Our percentage of growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year is higher than it has been in the past. With the pandemic, the students were entering our school with higher academic needs. The data we are collecting shows the students are successful at the essential standards,” Napoli expressed.

Golden Hills Elementary School earned the PBIS Silver Award, the PBIS Platinum Award, and the PBIS Gold Award for three consecutive school years following PLC implementation.

Percent growth in students performing at grade level in mathematics



Tongue River Elementary School

RANCHESTER, WYOMING



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 245 students
- › 28% free and reduced lunch
- › 14.2% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 86% White
- › 5% Hispanic
- › 4% Multiracial
- › 3% American Indian or Alaska Native
- › 1% Asian
- › 1% Black

Tongue River Elementary is a public school located in the rural setting of Ranchester, Wyoming, a farming and ranching community. The town sits just south of the Montana state line between the city of Sheridan and the Big Horn Mountains.



► CHALLENGE

Although Tongue River Elementary School had collaborative team meetings in place for several years, teachers were not yet working as effective teams in a professional learning community (PLC). They were not laser focused on the four critical questions essential to learning for all:

1. What do we want all students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if they learn it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

Determined to transform Tongue River into a high-functioning PLC, principal Annie Griffin attended a PLC at Work® Institute and returned to her school with **actionable strategies for improving collaborative team time**.

► IMPLEMENTATION

The first step was to create functional agendas and norms based on the four critical questions. It soon became clear that teachers were receptive to this and eager to learn more about the PLC process and improve their teams. Griffin attended scheduled meetings and worked with the teams to build their understanding. Special education staff and specialists also attended meetings. **It truly was a schoolwide collaborative effort.** Teams tackled challenging work, such as looking at common formative assessments, determining essentials, building proficiency scales, and examining data to guide instruction.

When a state-funded grant presented the opportunity for Tongue River teachers to attend regular Solution Tree professional development, school leadership seized the moment. A guiding coalition was formed to create and lead professional development and support teacher understanding of the PLC process.

Tongue River **faculty stepped up to this job-embedded professional learning experience and grew to become high functioning and to look at data prescriptively.** Daily Intervention and Extension time was built into the schedule. "The expectation schoolwide was that we would have all hands on deck to be sure the instruction our students receive during core, as well as during Intervention and Extension (I/E), is tailored to their unique needs based on data," explains Griffin.

Teacher teams began to skillfully utilize common district and formative assessments to guide instruction and planning by grade levels. Teachers began to share essential expectations with parents. In turn, feedback from families spoke volumes on the value of having that insight on their children's instruction and expectations. SMART goals are now set based on grade-level essentials. When goals are achieved, all students celebrate as a collective.

"We know the PLC process is not just a meeting, but rather an embedded culture to improve learning," Griffin says. Teachers

“At Tongue River, we believe that our teachers will always be our best resource, and the PLC process has allowed them to use data to make instructional decisions based on what is best for our unique students.”

—Annie Griffin, principal, Tongue River Elementary School, Wyoming

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

communicate with their grade-level cohort, as well as other specialists, about students' strengths and weaknesses. They use evidence to foster continuous school improvement. This time is vital to brainstorm different approaches and teaching strategies together as a team.

“At Tongue River, we believe that our teachers will always be our best resource, and the PLC process has allowed them to use data to make instructional decisions based on what is best for our unique students,” shares Griffin. **“Standards-based grading practices, along with the PLC process, remind us that we do not give up on any student. We work until they have achieved mastery.”**

The staff at Tongue River commits to high levels of learning from the very start of a student's education. Project GIFT, a literacy program created by Griffin, exposes local preschoolers

to a variety of books. Collaboration with early childhood program leaders, childhood screening efforts, and multiple conversations among teachers and the community ensure there is a variety of academic levels in the kindergarten classroom and that children who need extra time and support receive the right resources.

The collaborative process established at Tongue River has been crucial to navigating the very difficult times of the pandemic and supporting continuous school improvement. The school is now known for their PLC process. They have facilitated on-site visits with a neighboring school and offer support through conversations, document sharing, and observations. “We are happy to share what we have learned,” says Griffin. “We believe it is best practice.”

► RESULTS

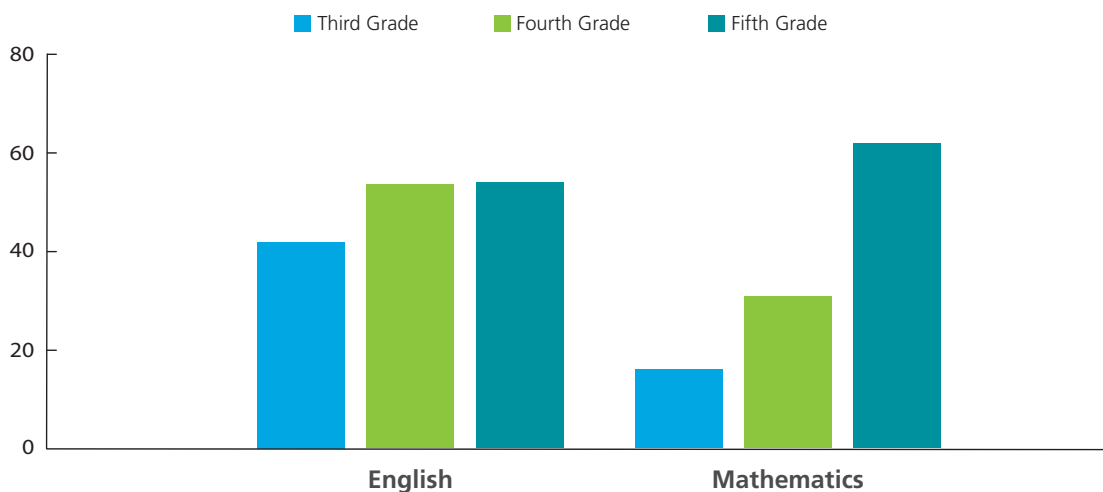
In just their second year of working together as a functioning PLC at Work school, Tongue River was named a National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education. In other accomplishments, discipline referrals decreased from 256 office visits to 63 in three years.

A study of one cohort of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch showed continuous improvement in English

and mathematics from third through fifth grade (see graph below). Percent proficiency increased 29% in English and 284% in math.

Percent proficiency also improved for students in fifth grade when compared over the course of three years. English proficiency rose 53% over the course of three years, and mathematics proficiency rose 63%.

Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding Proficiency in English and Math Who Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch



Data source: State Accountability—Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS) and Wyoming Test of Proficiency and Progress (WY-TOPP)

Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts Middle School

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **320** students
- › **59%** free and reduced lunch
- › **3%** English learners
- › **18%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **40%** Hispanic
- › **29%** Black
- › **28%** White
- › **3%** Multiracial

Operated by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts is an interdistrict magnet school program serving students from Hartford and nearly 60 surrounding suburban districts.

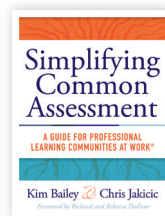
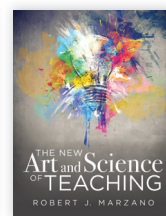
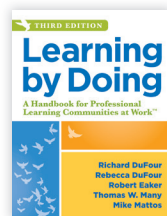


► CHALLENGE

In its first year of operation, nearly all of Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts' staff were brand-new teachers. They were immediately tested in the first month when almost 80% of students scored below proficient on the district's first common assessment. The school knew they needed to take immediate action.

► BOOKS STUDIED

GHAA principal Bo Ryan, literacy coach Sarah Henry, and assistant principal Brendan Hines read and discussed more than 50 Solution Tree books that were used for learning, sharing, creating, and research.



► To see the complete book study list visit
SolutionTree.com/GHAA

► IMPLEMENTATION

The staff of GHAA started building a professional learning community, relying on dozens of Solution Tree books to guide them on their journey. During the team's first professional development session, they used reproducibles from *Learning by Doing* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas W. Many to build shared knowledge and begin creating their own vision, mission, and collective commitments.

"In the last five years, we have used a variety of resources from Solution Tree to help improve our school," said Principal Bo Ryan. "During this time, we did not have the money to attend a professional development event or to have a consultant visit our school. I just bought the books, read everything possible, and shared the information with my instructional coach and assistant principal. We discussed the content and created a plan for school improvement."

The leadership team worked to embed professional learning into the school day, with every meeting focusing on student learning. Teachers were given 80 minutes of planning time daily and were

“The sharing of professional resources and knowledge allows our staff to learn as a unified group with consistent language, expectations and practices, and collaboratively created protocols. Our staff believes strongly in ongoing professional learning, researching best practices and resources to improve instructional methods.”

—Sarah Henry, literacy coach, Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, Connecticut

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

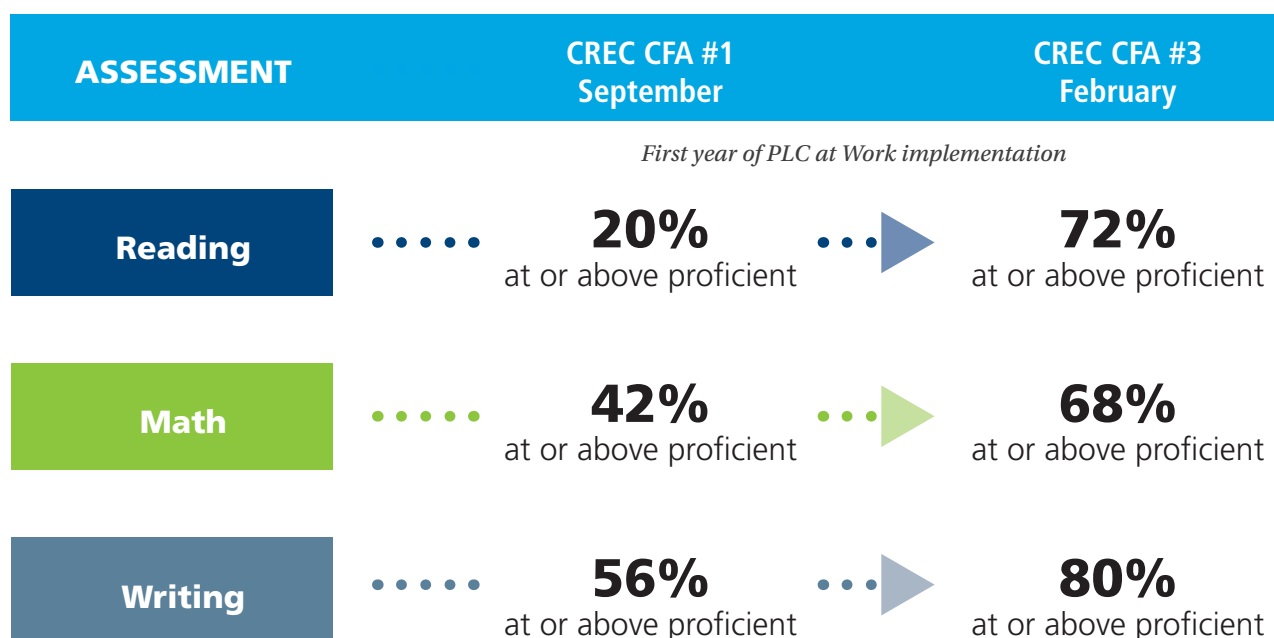
provided numerous collaborative learning opportunities: professional learning walks, peer visits, prior-to-unit planning, end-of-unit analysis, collaborative planning,

coaching with specialists, early-intervention meetings, and student-support meetings. The school also set aside four hours of professional development time monthly.

► RESULTS

GHAA became a true professional learning community with a relentless focus on helping all students achieve at high levels. After the initial common formative assessment (CFA) in September of the first year of operation, GHAA administered two additional CFAs in December of that year and in February the following year, with incredible results.

In Year 3, the school was identified as “Progressing” by the Connecticut State Department of Education. A Progressing school is one that has shown significant progress toward closing the achievement gap and improving overall student performance. GHAA also earned national recognition as a Model PLC at Work® school on AllThingsPLC.info.



Year 4

Avg. Percentage of Growth Target Achieved	STATE	CREC	GHAA
ELA–All Students	63.8%	61.4%	63.3%
ELA–High-Needs Students	58.3%	58.6%	64.4%
Math–All Students	65%	58.4%	61.2%
Math–High-Needs Students	57.4%	54.1%	60.7%

Sources: GHAA Next Generation Accountability Report and AllThingsPLC.info/GHAA

St. Andrews School

ST. ANDREWS, MANITOBA, CANADA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **376** students
- › **2%** special education

St. Andrews School is part of the Lord Selkirk School Division, which is located just north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The district includes 15 schools—11 elementary schools, 3 junior high schools, and 1 high school—and approximately 4,500 students. St. Andrews School is the second-largest school in the district, with 376 students and 40 staff.



Solution Tree

PLC AT WORK®
MODEL SCHOOL



Literacy skills are a priority from day one.

► CHALLENGE

Staff members at St. Andrews School completed a survey answering three questions:

1. What do we do well?
2. What do we need to improve?
3. What do you expect of the new principal?

Most staff stated that they wanted to have more time to collaborate. This was the beginning of St. Andrews's professional learning community (PLC)/response to intervention (RTI) journey. Data was collected for reading, attendance, and behavior, and results were presented to the entire staff.

At the time of the survey, only 73% of primary students and 81% of intermediate students were reading at grade level. Conversations were started with each teacher and each grade group regarding their reading results and instruction. The school found that data collection needed to improve and a closer look needed to be taken at what was being taught and what students were learning.

► IMPLEMENTATION

The following March, the concepts behind the theory and practice of PLCs were introduced. Grade groups and specialty groups looked through the English language arts curriculum to identify essential outcomes and target skills.



All of the students at St. Andrews are ‘our’ kids, and we cannot help all of them learn what they must learn without a collective effort. With the guidance of Solution Tree associates and resources over the past several years, the staff at St. Andrews School has been hard at work building grade-level professional learning communities and our response to intervention, which we call W.I.N.—What I Need. Ensuring all students are learning at high levels is the way we do business at our school.”

—Harold Freiter, former principal, St. Andrews School, Manitoba

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

In April, St. Andrews sent a group of teachers to a Solution Tree event in Winnipeg, where RTI experts Mike Mattos, Chris Weber, and Austin Buffum were presenting. When the teachers returned, they were convinced that St. Andrews needed to make a change. In June of that year, team norms were created for each grade group.

In September, teachers participated in a book study on *Learning by Doing* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca

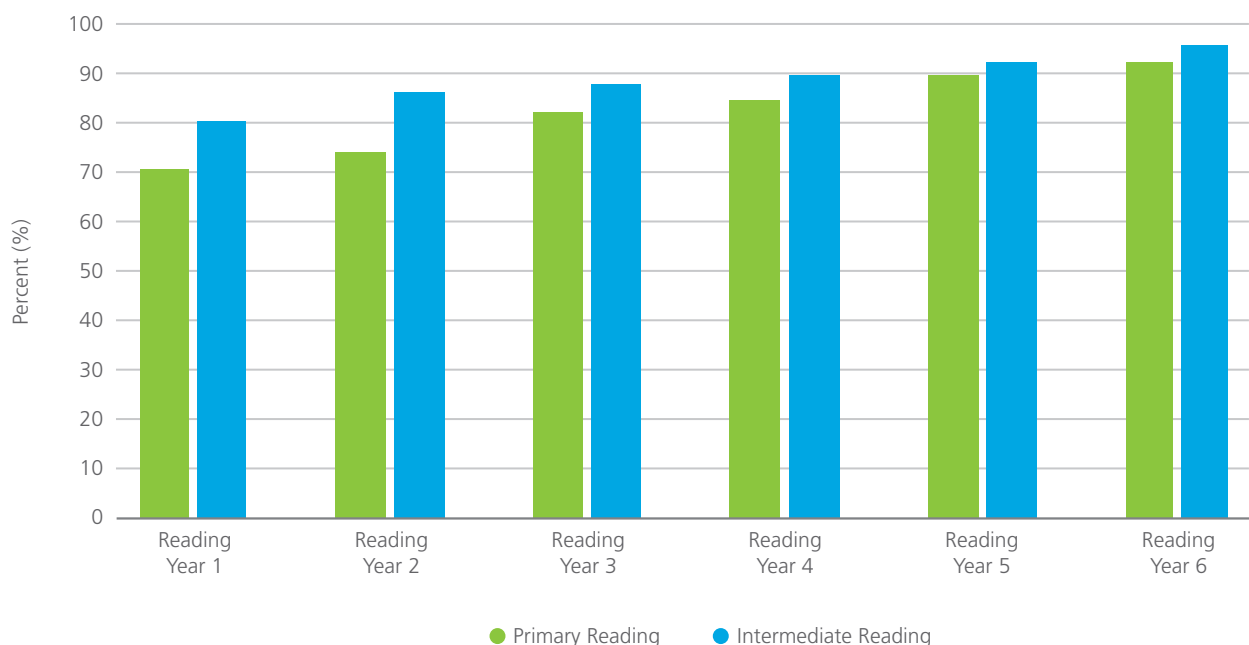
DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas W. Many. Through the collective efforts of the entire staff, an RTI structure was put into place. In order to have a well-thought-out system of interventions, a strong PLC focus was needed. The following year, staff were led through the process of rewriting the school’s mission and vision statements to fully illustrate that St. Andrews is a school where all students learn.

► RESULTS

St. Andrews uses the PM Benchmark Reading Assessment Resource three or four times a year to determine students’ reading levels. As students move into the later intermediate grades, a combination of the PM Benchmark and the Johns Basic Reading Inventory are used to determine reading levels. Based on

previous-year scores, St. Andrews constantly increases its benchmark percentage to challenge staff to ensure all students are learning at high levels. “Our long-term benchmark is for 100% of our students to reach year-end expectations in reading,” says former principal Harold Freiter.

St. Andrews School Reading Data
(Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Grade-Level Expectations)



PLC AT WORK® SERVICES

To help you determine which services may be right for you, each of our professional learning engagements is designed to fit your goals, budget, and time commitment.

BUILDING Your Skills	DEEPENING Your Skills	SUSTAINING Your Skills
<p>One day with an expert in your school or district. Your team will gain understanding, inspiration, and strategies to start a professional learning program.</p>	<p>More intensive 2- to 4-day sessions with an expert to guide your entire staff or a smaller team to deepen understanding and further progress.</p>	<p>Work with one or several experts across multiple days to embed key processes, practices, and procedures designed to significantly improve staff performance and student achievement.</p>
<p>PLC at Work® Overview</p> <hr/> <p>Districtwide Framework for PLC at Work® Teams</p> <hr/> <p>Community Connections and Your PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Using the PLC at Work® Process to Build Confident Learners</p> <hr/> <p>Making Teamwork Meaningful</p> <hr/> <p>Career and Technical Education (CTE) and PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Establishing a Collaborative Team Culture: Shifting from Me to We</p>	<p>Creating a Collaborative Culture</p> <hr/> <p>Identifying Essential Learnings</p> <hr/> <p>Small Schools and Singletons in a PLC at Work®: Unique Challenges, Unlimited Potential</p> <hr/> <p>Coaching Collaborative Teams: Amplify Your Impact in a PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Implement It! Collaborative Teams</p> <hr/> <p>Leadership Tools for Deepening PLC Implementation</p>	<p>Supporting Your PLC Literacy Teams: From Unit Planning and Execution to Data Analysis</p> <hr/> <p>Embedded Coaching</p> <hr/> <p>Virtual Coaching for Principals and District Administrators</p> <hr/> <p>Coaching Academy</p>
1-DAY COMMITMENT	2 TO 4-DAY COMMITMENT	MULTI-DAY COMMITMENT

All training is delivered by a PLC at Work® author or certified associate.



Mike Mattos, author, educator, co-creator of RTI at Work™

Stay focused on the right work

By Mike Mattos

It has been one of the greatest honors of my teaching career to join with educators across the world in learning how to work collaboratively and create effective systems of support.

When the process is done well, it helps students and educators. Kids get the additional time and support needed to succeed in school, and teachers are not placed in the position of trying to individually meet the needs of their students. Helping students, at the cost of asking more and more of educators, is unsustainable. We must support students and teachers to reach our goal of high levels of learning for all.

I see so many inspiring traits in schools deeply committed to being true professional learning communities. I love how the educators focus on what they can control, instead of allowing themselves to be victims of circumstance. They view obstacles as opportunities to learn. And most important, they create a culture of hope—they see the potential in every student and in themselves.

As professionals, we should base our practices on what is proven to work. Proof of best practice is based upon research and validated by real-life schools that are getting better results in student learning.

Over my 35 years in this profession, I have never seen a more compelling case of best practice than the research that supports the power of the PLC at Work framework. Equally important, on the AllThingsPLC.info website, there is evidence of hundreds of schools and districts that are using the PLC process to create highly effective multitiered systems of supports to meet the academic and behavior needs of their students.

During these post-pandemic times, our students need support more than ever. The path forward is clear; the key is having the courage to get started and the discipline to stay focused on the right work.



LEARN MORE NOW
SolutionTree.com/Evidence

Catoosa County Public Schools

RINGGOLD, GEORGIA

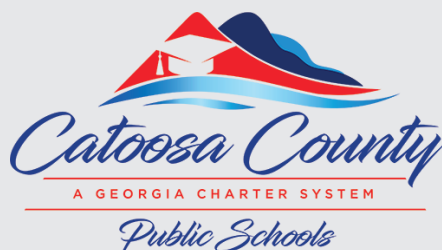


DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **16** schools
- › **10,613** students

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **86.5%** White
- › **4.5%** Hispanic
- › **3.7%** Multiracial
- › **3%** Black
- › **2.1%** Asian
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.1%** Other



► CHALLENGE

Over the summer, Catoosa County Public Schools applied for and was approved as a charter system. School and district leaders were excited about the flexibility granted by the new status, but they also realized the level of accountability was changing. At the same time, the school district was notified that, due to the high number of students identified for special education services, it was being placed on the "Disproportionate List."

Collaboration between district leaders began a new journey. During the charter system application process, strong strategic planning had been completed, but general and special education leaders now needed to delve deeper into the data to determine immediate areas of concern. While student achievement in English language arts and mathematics both needed attention, reading achievement, especially at the elementary level, surfaced as the top priority.

► IMPLEMENTATION

General and special education leaders embarked on a search for proven, research-based practices. A team of four district-level leaders attended the Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™ Institute in Dallas where the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® and RTI at Work processes were united. A new vision of effectively operating as a learning organization began to emerge.

"We had a lot of learning to do," says Dr. Kim Nichols, assistant superintendent of Catoosa County Public Schools.

Changes began immediately. Administrator and academic coach meetings were redesigned to focus on building capacity among school and district leaders. Learning about the PLC at Work process of improving student achievement became a priority. Due to the problem of over-identifying students for special education services, school and district leaders were also required to quickly learn more about effective RTI practices. Catoosa County Public Schools decided to move away from the traditional RTI model in favor of the RTI at Work process.

“You have to put the time in to learn, and you cannot let up. You never get to stop learning.”

—Kim Nichols, assistant superintendent, Catoosa County Public Schools, Georgia

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

District and school leaders spent the next year studying and discussing effective PLC and RTI practices through collaborative book studies. A districtwide focus on the four guiding PLC

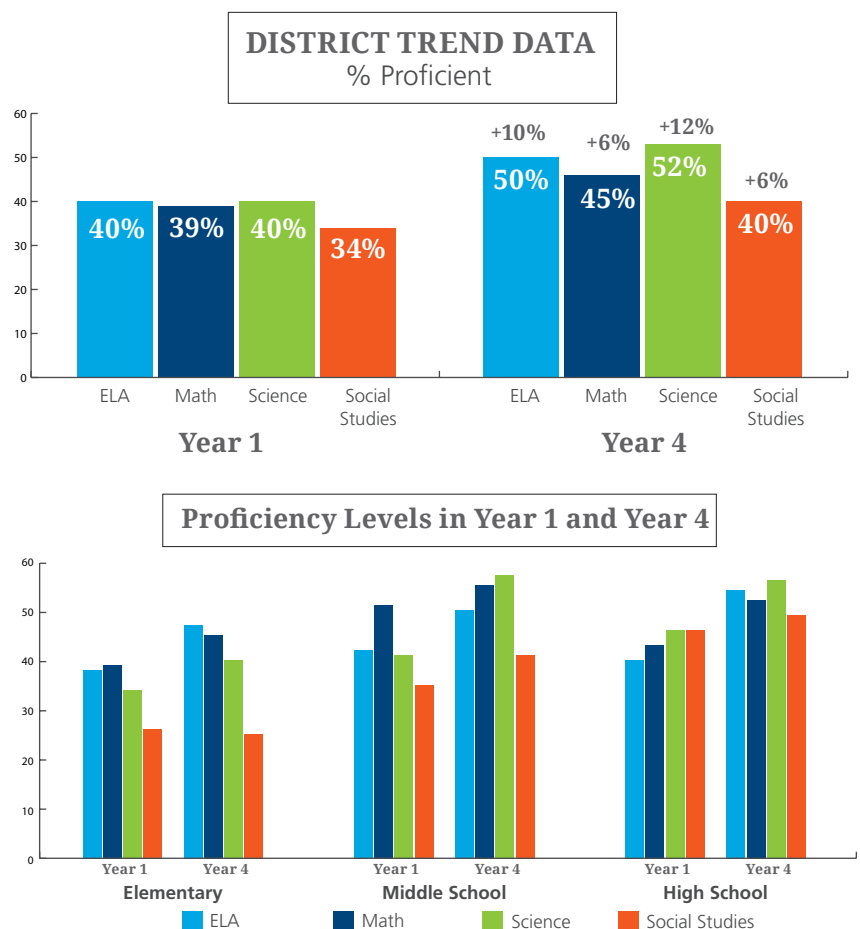
questions became the driving force behind making changes. Emphasis on learning instead of teaching became the new filter.

► RESULTS

Catoosa County Public Schools was named a Model PLC at Work district and 12 of its 16 schools have been named Model PLC at Work schools. The district has also received numerous awards, and its schools have been recognized for their significant gains in student achievement.

According to Dr. Nichols, the district's shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—for students and staff—has been critical to its success.

“From a district perspective, you have to be that lead learner,” advises Dr. Nichols. “You have to start with yourself. If you want to have an impact and see things in your district operate differently, then you have to be the lead learner. You have to put the time in to learn, and you cannot let up. You never get to stop learning.”



Windsor Central School District

WINDSOR, NEW YORK



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 5 schools
- › 1,592 students
- › 1% English learners
- › 13% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 92% White
- › 2% Black
- › 2% Hispanic
- › 2% Multiracial
- › 1% Asian
- › 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Windsor Central School District is located in Windsor, New York, a community of approximately 6,250 residents.



► CHALLENGE

Windsor Central School District, like others in upstate New York, was facing dramatic changes: The area population—and subsequently, school enrollment—was declining significantly. Poverty was dramatically gripping families and their students.

Windsor Central was ranked 13th out of 15 among districts in its region, when considering overall elementary and high school testing rates. Staff turnover was rampant. And a 78% four-year graduation rate for the district was not satisfactory either.

“Our staff was isolated, and it did not focus on student learning outcomes,” superintendent Dr. Jason Andrews said. “We were not really a desirable place for folks to go.”

Most importantly, students were not receiving the targeted support they needed to succeed beyond the K–12 classroom environment.

It was then that Dr. Andrews and Windsor Central’s staff knew it needed to act and take accountability for the learning of every student across its high school, middle school, and three elementary schools.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Windsor Central contributes its success with Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™ to the tools and strategies gained at Solution Tree events, as well collaborating with Solution Tree associates on staff conference days.

“They certainly helped to ensure that we were staying as focused, consistent, and adhering to the critical elements of quality PLC implementation over the course of many, many years,” said Barbara Phillips, Windsor Central’s director of learning and continuous improvement.

Windsor Central’s administrators and teachers also utilized key book resources, such as *Taking Action* and *Simplifying Response to Intervention*, to broaden their knowledge of RTI and inform decision making in the best interests of their students. These texts provided the staff at Windsor with the research-based, practical strategies and tools to apply to their own innovative,

“We’re continually looking at how students are doing, so that we’re getting interventions to the kids who need the most, when they need it the most.”

—Barbara Phillips, director of learning and continuous improvement,
Windsor Central School District, New York

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

locally developed structures to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The Extended Student Contact Model, for instance, fostered multigrade-level collaboration between mathematics and ELA content experts, allowing students to have the same core content instructors for two consecutive years. The model, intentionally designed to deeply address the Four Critical Questions of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work®, also provided instructors with the opportunities to build stronger relationships with students, families, and colleagues.

In addition, a team of Windsor educators was developed to serve as full-time Tier 3 interventionists to fill foundational gaps of elementary students performing in the bottom 3–5% of their peer group. The team now travels to all elementary buildings, with their time regularly adjusted based on the current need of elementary students across the district.

► RESULTS

With more than 15 years invested into PLC and RTI work, Windsor Central now boasts much to be proud of. The district consistently ranks first or second in the region academically, despite having much starker poverty rates than its peers.

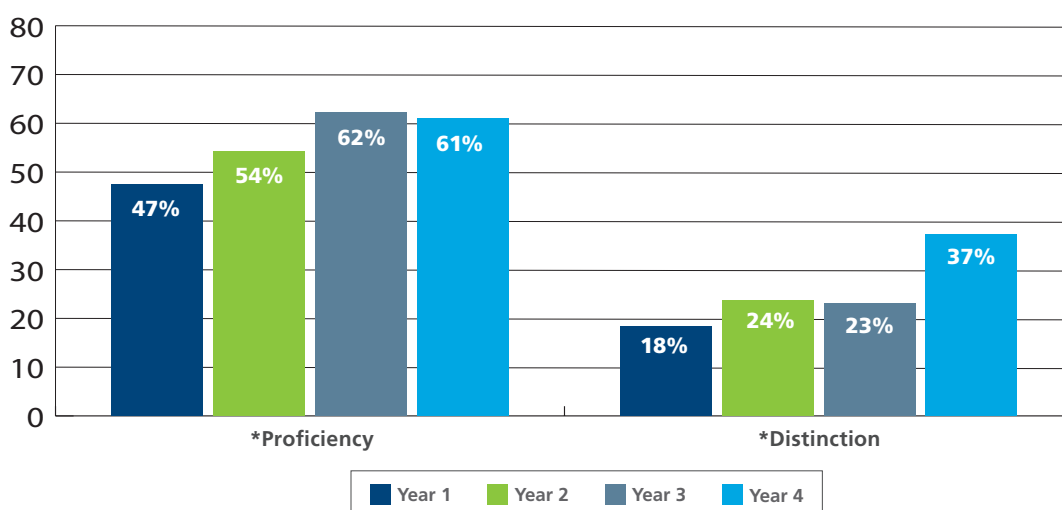
“To get to number one, that’s a story in and of itself,” Dr. Andrews said. “The thought, 15 years ago, is that it would be laughable that Windsor would be first in the region.”

But the district’s progress is no joke: after initially offering three advanced courses, Windsor Central High School now offers 34 such classes.

Windsor Central’s graduation rate is now a promising 95%.

“There’s been a whole lot of innovation. And part of that, from a cultural standpoint, is building that collective responsibility—truly getting to the ‘our kids’ [mentality] in our buildings across the district, across grade levels and between grade levels,” Dr. Andrews said. “We’re all responsible for all of their performance and their learning.”

4th Grade Math Performance Measures



Proficiency: a score of three or four on a four-point scale
Distinction: a score of four on a four-point scale

Source: New York State Education Department

John F. Kennedy High School

FREMONT, CALIFORNIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **1,406** students
- › **42%** free and reduced lunch
- › **13%** English learners
- › **18%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **35.4%** Hispanic
- › **24.7%** Asian
- › **18.9%** White
- › **8.9%** Black
- › **5.4%** Multiracial
- › **1.1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **0.4%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **5.3%** Other

John F. Kennedy High School is a public high school located in Fremont, a part of Alameda County and California's San Francisco Bay Area. The school was established in 1965 and serves grades 9–12. JFK is to be committed to the education of a diverse population that meets the changing demands of a global society.



► CHALLENGE

In years prior, John F. Kennedy High School had a reputation for being an underachieving school where parents did not want to send their students. Major concerns for parents were student safety, exposure to violence, very little school pride, and a low rate of students completing the necessary coursework to be eligible to attend a four-year college or university.

The school also experienced over 300 student suspensions in one school year alone. The parents and students of JFK wanted to see much lower suspension numbers, particularly from students of color.

Then one year, JFK's English department gave a reading assessment to every 9th grader. The results showed that 58% of students read three or more grades below grade level, 23% of students read one to two grades below grade level, and only 19% of students read at grade level.

► IMPLEMENTATION

JFK leaders and educators knew a change was needed. Principal Edward Velez, along with educators and administrators at JFK, collaboratively reviewed the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work® process and started introducing response to intervention (RTI) into their process.

With the use of Title I funds, the team later attended an RTI at Work™ Institute for two days with Mike Mattos. Over the last four years, JFK has used Title I funding to create opportunities for professional development, technology, and collaboration time in order to develop an RTI model at their school.

After the institute, JFK began to implement new approaches to student achievement with the PLC process. The school staff used effective collaboration, formative and summative assessments, data analysis, and targeted interventions to improve the experience of every student at JFK.

Within the first two years of using the PLC at Work and RTI at Work process, JFK staff spent time establishing norms and implementing foundational practices like essential standards and formative assessments. In year three, they voted to include interventions in the school day and experimented with different scheduling prototypes, adjusting their approach when data showed they weren't quite going in the right direction. They also invested in software that enabled every teacher to offer interventions or enrichments.

"We found that in order to be successful, we must constantly analyze our programs for effectiveness. In this sense, our school was constantly developing our system of intervention and support so that we never felt as if we completed the road to RTI," said Velez.

Each day, JFK offered 50 to 60 different sessions for intervention and enrichment. Students were also exposed to more than two hours within the school day to extend their learning or receive immediate intervention before they failed.



We became, by nature, the place where everyone came no matter what the student had going on. And so we very quickly just kept taking everybody in because that's what we do; we don't turn away students."

—Edward Velez, principal, John F. Kennedy High School, California

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

At the core of JFK's new approach is PRIDE, which stands for be *prepared* for learning, be *respectful* to all, understand your *impact*, maintain *discipline*, and *explore*. These five rules serve as a foundation and response to student behavior that plays a major role in improved levels of learning.

"The biggest difference in our school is the culture that we built through it. The magic we found in lowering our suspension rate was building the idea with kids that they are

worth listening to. We also saw it in creating those essential behaviors and expectations, plugging in the RTI process, and from the beginning to the end allowing our students to understand what we expected and then having our teachers agree that they'd be held accountable for the same behaviors," said Velez.

► RESULTS

After six months of deliberate instruction and intervention, students were assessed on reading levels again. The post-assessment showed that the number of ninth-grade students reading on grade level doubled to 38%.

JFK educators have seen a tremendous change in student achievement and investment as a result of the RTI at Work process. After the first year of implementation, there were 27 students who were re-designated as English proficient as a result of targeted intervention and support.

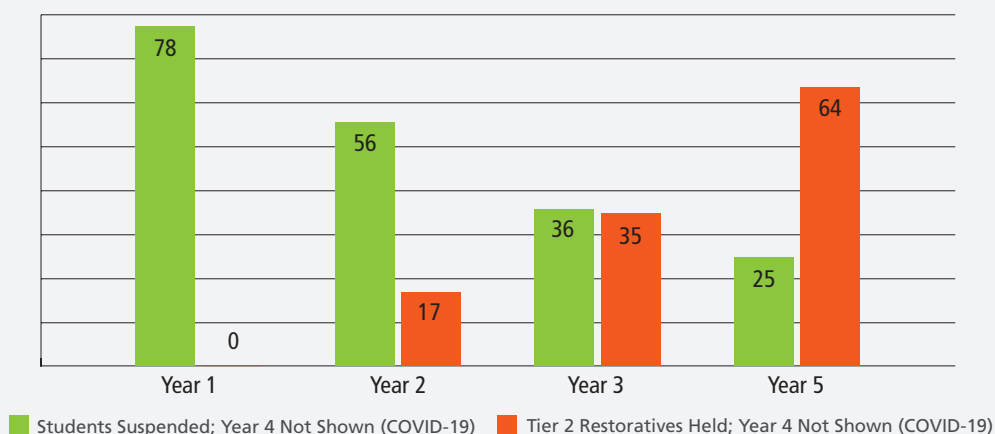
Following implementation, the number of students suspended dropped from 130 to 78 in the first year, 56 in the second year, and was all the way down in the 40s in the third year. By the time students returned after the pandemic, suspensions were at just 25.

The most rewarding piece of data for JFK, according to Velez, is the fact that 75% of Black students met or exceeded grade level in ELA.

Other noteworthy achievements:

- 97% graduation rate
- 68% of students in the "meets or exceeds grade level" category in ELA
- Honored as a California Distinguished School for their work to close the achievement gap for three consecutive years
- Since Year 3 of implementation, an average of five students each year have been found to no longer need IEP services (special education) due to their ability to meet grade-level standards
- Kennedy Athletic Teams have earned more than 15 California Interscholastic Federation Championships for having the highest GPA in Northern California

RTI at JFKHS: Tier 2 Impact on Student Suspensions



RTI AT WORK™ SERVICES

To help you determine which services may be right for you, each of our professional learning engagements is designed to fit your goals, budget, and time commitment.



All training is delivered by an RTI at Work author or certified associate.

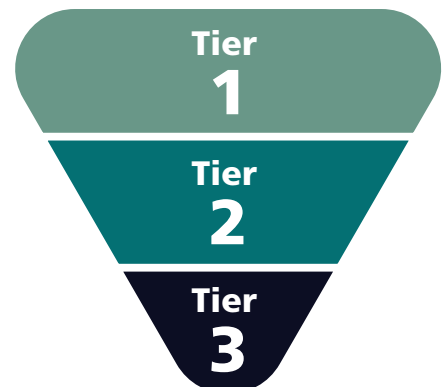
Four Critical Questions of a PLC

- 1 What knowledge, skills, and dispositions** should every student acquire as a result of this unit, this course, or this grade level?
- 2 How will we know** when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?
- 3 How will we respond** when some students do not learn?
- 4 How will we extend the learning** for students who are already proficient?

If RTI seems overwhelming and your school or district struggles to implement interventions that make a difference, take a step back and assess your school culture and structure.

The Third Critical Question in a PLC at Work®:

How will we respond when some students do not learn it?





Sharon V. Kramer, author, educator,
creator of Priority Schools in a PLC at Work



Improving schools saves students' lives

By Sharon V. Kramer

The success stories in this section represent a few of the many accomplishments of Priority Schools. Each one offers evidence of the endless work of educators in schools across the United States who have invited us to be part of their continuous improvement journeys. We learn so much from them through the challenges and struggles they face in their daily service to at-risk populations. Their tireless focus on students is what keeps us going. Each story is a snapshot of a journey that continues one step at a time with the belief and commitment that our students are so worth the enormous and oftentimes difficult effort that it takes to ensure learning.

Each school on the PLC journey is spreading the message that *all students can learn* when *all* truly means *ALL*. Most schools have pockets of students who are underperforming in relation to their grade level or peers. Priority Schools have a greater number of students with learning gaps. Their continuous improvement process begins with a laser-sharp focus on learning and an examination of

all the processes, procedures, and policies that may be in the way of student learning. This is a daunting task that requires each school to harness the power within. Improvement requires that teams, teachers, and administrators exert a focused, cohesive, and consistent effort over time.

It is so rewarding to work alongside these schools as a thought partner guiding the PLC process in a way that meets each school's individual needs and has the greatest impact on learning and results. It is well known that students who fail in school have a difficult time throughout their entire lives, including experiencing a shorter life span. We believe that as schools and districts improve, they are saving students' lives. What could be more fulfilling, important, and urgent? These schools and the educators within them are an inspiration to us all. Improving our schools and increasing the options and opportunities for students change the lives of our students forever.



LEARN MORE NOW
SolutionTree.com/Evidence

Lindsey Elementary School

WARNER ROBINS, GEORGIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **280** students
- › **100%** free and reduced lunch
- › **16.3%** English learners
- › **17%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **70.6%** Black
- › **20.1%** Hispanic
- › **5.9%** White
- › **3.1%** Multiracial
- › **0.3%** Asian

Lindsey Elementary School was a Title I school located in Houston County School District just south of metropolitan Atlanta. It earned Model PLC at Work® school status in 2020. The school building now serves as a wraparound center for the district

Dr. Anisa Baker-Busby led the journey of Lindsey Elementary to become a Model PLC at Work school. She is now principal of Shirley Hills Elementary, also located in Houston County School District, where she plans to further the PLC work initiated by the previous principal.



► CHALLENGE

"When I became principal, Lindsey Elementary was identified as a priority school and one of the most underperforming schools in the district," recalled former principal Dr. Anisa Baker-Busby. "Everyone knew Lindsey was struggling, but no one knew how to turn it around. Everyone had ideas, but no one had actually done this work in a priority school."

In June, Baker-Busby attended a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® Institute in Atlanta, Georgia, joined by two teachers. Their goal was to establish a guiding coalition to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students. This would mark the beginning of the school's journey toward implementing a PLC at Work culture.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Baker-Busby and her staff worked diligently to build a high-performing PLC, focusing on assessment and Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™ practices. They studied books: *Learning by Doing*, 3rd edition; *Design in Five*; *Make It Happen*; *Taking Action: A Handbook for RTI at Work™*; and *Best Practices at Tier 2*. They attended other events, and Baker-Busby connected with Solution Tree authors and presenters on social media.



“Priority Schools in a PLC at Work concisely guided me on what we need to do, how to look at data and data pictures, and how to tuck it all in when you have so many students performing below grade level. *School Improvement for All* was my handbook for improving our school.”

—Dr. Anisa Baker-Busby, principal, Lindsey Elementary School, Georgia

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

All of this was establishing a solid foundation, but Lindsey Elementary had the additional challenges of a Priority School. That’s when Baker-Busby discovered the book *School Improvement for All*, by Sharon V. Kramer, and dove into learning about Priority Schools in a PLC at Work.

“This brought the PLC at Work concepts down to a level of detail that I needed to access,” said Baker-Busby. “It concisely guided me on what we need to do, how to look at data and data pictures, and how to tuck it all in when you have so many students performing below grade level. This was my handbook for improving our school.”

Embracing Priority Schools in a PLC at Work, the staff worked from a strategic plan on how to move from one level to the next. They learned the importance of scooping up prerequisites, or teaching previous years’ essential standards to students in need and then connecting the

learning back to the current grade-level standards. With so many students below grade level at Lindsey, the easy path would have been to water down standards and assessments. But they committed to the purpose of Priority Schools in a PLC at Work, which is to stay focused on grade level.

Just as results were affirming the efforts of Lindsey educators, the pandemic hit. But thanks to the collaborative culture created at Lindsey, staff were able to respond effectively.

“After a year of Covid, we came back and focused on what mattered most. We hit essential standards hard. We worked on common formative assessments, and we focused heavily on providing strategic and targeted interventions for students,” said Baker-Busby.

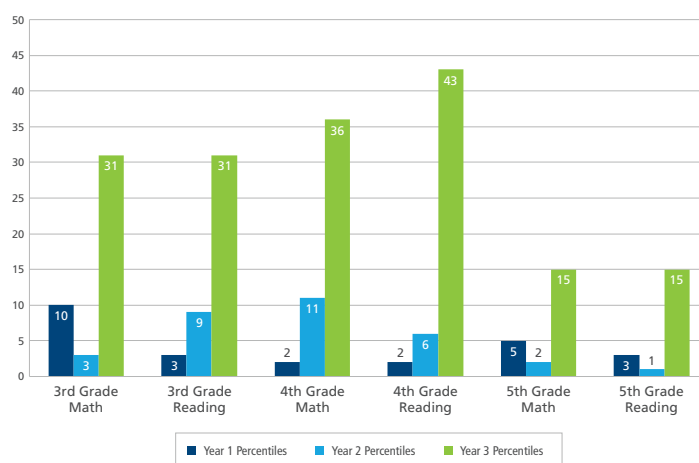
► RESULTS

Like other schools around the world, student achievement at Lindsey Elementary took a hit during the pandemic. The achievement scores, which were still not where teachers would like them to be, remained low or even decreased over the pandemic years. Conditional growth indicators painted an even more stark picture of how Covid affected student learning, plummeting for the most part during quarantine.

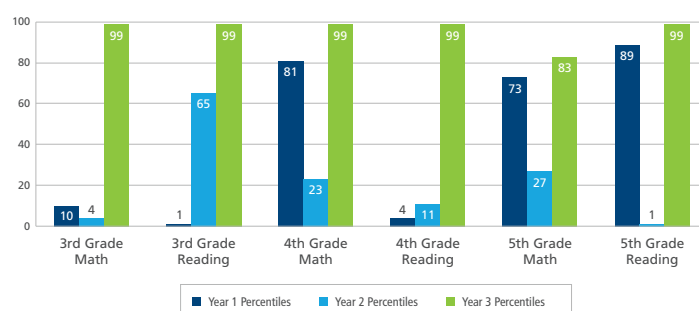
When educators and students returned to the classroom, Dr. Baker-Busby insisted that their mission had not changed. Every teacher, every support staff member, and every adult in the school was there to support all students learning at or on grade level. In the spring of that same year, the growth percentiles showed what that dedication meant for student success.

“The teachers would tell you,” said Dr. Baker-Busby, “this shifted the entire school culture. The work of PLC really does change the entire school mindset.” Not only that, but parent participation also improved. The entire community began to view the work being done at Lindsey with the attitude that learning is required for every student, and they supported that mission with their words and, more importantly, their actions.

3rd–5th Grade MAP Math and Reading Achievement Percentiles



3rd–5th Grade MAP Math and Reading School Conditional Growth Percentiles



Huntsville Elementary School

HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 615 students
- › 68% free and reduced lunch
- › 28% English learners
- › 16% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 42% Hispanic
- › 35% White
- › 19% Black
- › 3% Multiracial
- › 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native
- › 0.2% Asian

Huntsville Elementary School serves Kindergarten through fourth grade students from the City of Huntsville, Texas, the county seat of Walker County. It is the center of the Huntsville micropolitan area and is in the East Texas Piney Woods on Interstate 45, which runs between Houston and Dallas.



PLC AT WORK®
MODEL SCHOOL

► CHALLENGE

The journey began at Huntsville Elementary School more than four years ago. **The campus had experienced five different principals in six years, an 80% staff turnover rate, no systems for planning, interventions or behavior, and an “improvement required” rating from the state.** Huntsville Elementary was in critical need of serious change.

Leadership tackled these challenges by first surveying staff needs for personal and professional development, establishing a new master schedule, creating mandatory Wednesday collaborative team meetings focused on the professional learning communities (PLC) process, and prioritizing the creation of a positive school climate. At the end of the year, even though campus data had improved, Huntsville was still rated an “improvement required” campus, and they were now looking at a Year 2 critical situation.

Due to accountability and the severity of being an “improvement required” Year 2 campus, a large focus fell on third- and fourth-grade data tracking in an effort to capture all students and improve upon STAAR results. **The school worked hard to establish a stable climate and culture focused on the PLC process.** They were able to retain 90% of the staff in the second year of this work and gain academic coaches for reading and mathematics, as well as finalize their school improvement effort with their Regional Service Center. In addition, the district now had new leadership, and this leadership announced the beginning of a partnership with Solution Tree.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Huntsville Elementary School engaged in Priority Schools in a PLC at Work® processes and practices with Solution Tree coaches Robin Noble and Karen Power. When they first completed a campus needs assessment, staff were excited to discover that the majority of the areas assessed fell in the realm of “practicing” category with only a few areas still in “attempting.” This meant that **they were well on their way to embracing school improvement practices that would help leverage student learning and achievement.** It was during this year that the campus began to identify essential standards and develop proficiency maps that would allow teachers to focus their efforts.

Teachers started collaborating around the essentials and monitoring data frequently to guarantee that the standards were being met. It was during this year that they **established an intense system of interventions** shared by all grade levels. Several staff members attended a Response to Intervention (RTI) at Work™ Institute and returned ready to share with their teams what they had learned.

“Once you start going to a school where people are happy and supportive, it just changes everything. Kids are intuitive to that. If we expect students to be successful, we need to have a positive culture.”

—Heather Bell, instructional coach, Huntsville Elementary School, Texas

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Through the use of the RTI pyramid, teams began to work collaboratively with students through interventions. These interventions focused on specific skills within the essentials. Teachers were now able to track student progress across all grade levels.

► RESULTS

Over the last four years, Huntsville Elementary has gone from a campus of turmoil and survival to one where student achievement is the primary focus. As they have learned and tightened up the PLC process, the culture has positively shifted and school staff understand the importance of facing the facts with current reality and continually adjusting to do what is best for “our students.” As instructional coach Heather Bell puts it, “We are looking at data and creating an action plan. We face our current reality and identify what we want to do better.”

At present, **Huntsville has retained 98% of staff, and solid systems are in place.** They continue to tighten up current practices and work with the guiding coalition to become more learning focused rather than task focused. A great deal of work centers on intervention across all grade levels while at the same time maintaining staff and student safety protocols during these challenging times.

Then, just when staff were getting really comfortable with the processes, COVID-19 developed and everything shifted to remote learning. There was no state assessment that year, but Huntsville educators were able to track steady improvements across the grade levels up to the in-person learning dismissal for COVID-19.

All grade levels continue to track data, paying close attention to deficits that have been caused by constant educational disruptions from COVID-19.

Over the past three years, state achievement data has shown an 11% increase in reading, a 15% increase in mathematics (earning two distinctions for growth from the Texas Education Agency), and a 21% increase in writing.

“We are quite pleased that we have now established vertical teams that are planning across all grade levels and setting baselines for required skills,” says principal Christy Cross. “As a campus, we also have been able to shift to all online assessments. Even though our state has granted a reprieve from accountability this year, we are still holding ourselves accountable for the data we receive and plan to continue to tighten up our efforts around what is truly essential.”



Huntsville Elementary School 3 Year Data Reports (STAAR)

Palmer Elementary School

RENO, NEVADA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **503** students
- › **71%** free and reduced lunch
- › **31.2%** English learners
- › **16.7%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **62.2%** Hispanic
- › **27.2%** White
- › **4.2%** Multiracial
- › **2%** Black
- › **1.8%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **1.4%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **1.2%** Asian

Palmer Elementary School is located in Sun Valley, Nevada, a community of approximately 20,000 residents near Reno, Nevada.



► CHALLENGE

With student proficiency rates hovering around 28% in English and math—and an unsightly two-star school rating—former Palmer Elementary School principal Raegan Virgil¹ knew major changes were necessary to improve student outcomes.

Virgil tried changing the class schedule and rearranging her teacher teams. She brought literacy and math coaches into the building.

And yet, Palmer's numbers did not move.

"There was a very pervasive feeling of hopelessness, with both staff and students," said Virgil, who oversaw professional learning community (PLC) implementation at the school. "Foremost, I wanted to address our achievement rates and our culture."

► IMPLEMENTATION

Although it was already late spring, an inconvenient time for educators to roll out new strategies, Virgil and her team committed to Solution Tree's support. Palmer's leadership team attended a two-day training session with PLC associate Geri Parscale and scheduled a few on-site visits with Robin Noble, an expert with more than 30 years of experience in education.

"It allowed us to really hit the ground running the next year," Virgil said.

And in the next year, Palmer's teachers and students began to flourish.

Palmer's teams established norms and a clear purpose and identified two power standards to start the process. Noble aided the school by working with PLC teams to create common formative assessments, form strong interventions, make SMART goals, and fine-tune the overall process.

¹ Virgil is now serving as principal within the school district at F. W. Traner Middle School. Palmer Elementary is continuing its PLC work with associate Robin Noble.

“Students and teachers were encouraged and motivated by their successes, and even the resistant teachers got on board.”

—Raegan Virgil, former principal, Palmer Elementary School, Nevada

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

“Most of the teachers bought into the vision and purpose of the work immediately,” Virgil said.

Palmer’s teams adopted the mantra of “Fail Forward,” stressing that difficulty would be part of the process. Instructors were reminded to stay focused on their long-term goals.

► RESULTS

In just one year, Palmer saw stunningly positive instances of growth among once-troubling state testing scores.

The third-grade team increased proficiency from 28% on the state ELA test to 48% over two years—a figure Virgil says could easily keep growing. The third-grade team also improved math proficiency from 41% to 57% in that same span.

Furthermore, Palmer’s “CIT” students—children in transition, or those experiencing homelessness—recorded a large reading proficiency score growth, from 17% to 35%, a gap-closing data movement compared to the general student population’s score of 41%.

“It was a huge leap for them,” Virgil said.

“As we began to see some small wins with some of the learning targets, the teachers really started getting motivated,” Virgil said. “By the second semester, they were getting much more efficient and effective with the process.”

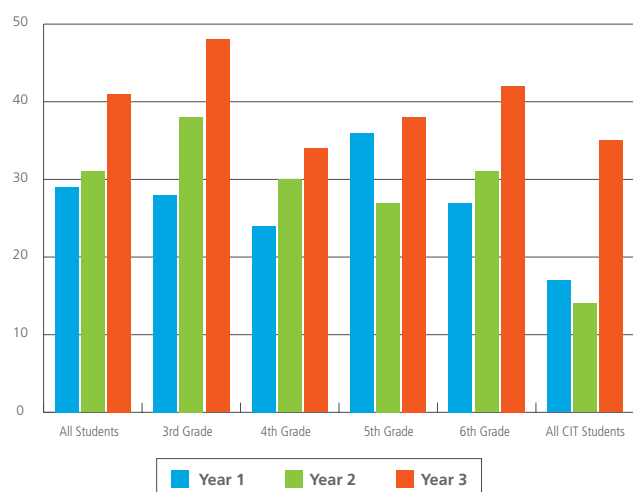
The community of parents and stakeholders was also pleased with the extra interventions students were receiving.

“We heard a lot of positive feedback, especially during conference week when we really had an opportunity to speak with parents one-on-one.”

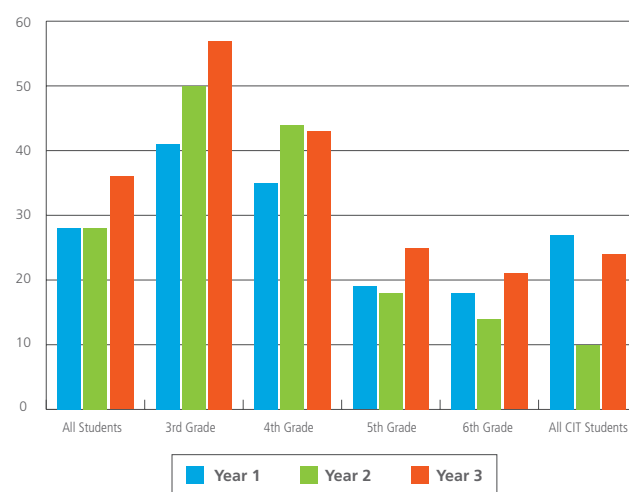
The successes, in turn, continue to stack for Palmer. Teachers are becoming quicker and more effective at assessments and interventions. The number of students requiring interventions has gone down. Teachers are owning the responsibility of ensuring higher levels of learning for every student, and the data is reflecting their collective commitment.

“I think that is the true power of PLCs, the site-based leadership that it creates,” Virgil said. “The teachers own the process, and changes in the principalship or curriculum don’t affect it.”

Overall ELA Percent at or Above Standard



Overall Math Percent at or Above Standard





John Marshall Enterprise High School

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **707** students
- › **75.5%** free and reduced lunch
- › **6.6%** English learners
- › **23%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **71%** Black
- › **11%** Hispanic
- › **1.8%** Asian; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **6.5%** Other

John Marshall Enterprise High School is located in northwest Oklahoma City, which has a population of more than 600,000. The school is in the Oklahoma City Public School System, an urban district that serves 46,000 students.



► CHALLENGE

Like many schools, John Marshall Enterprise High School had pockets of excellence, but no consistent schoolwide culture that supported the success of every student. Students were struggling with math and reading in the middle school grades. There were so many unknown variables that teachers didn't know where to begin to address underperformance. The data was there, but the staff didn't know how to use it to inform instruction. "We didn't have a way to see how students were doing individually," said former principal Aspasia Carlson. "We were looking at student averages only."

As a result, instruction was not targeted for each student's learning needs. While staff would celebrate the students who succeeded, they did not question why others were struggling. The pervading culture was that John Marshall was not a high-performing school, and this belief extended from the school leaders and teachers to the students, their families, and the community. Everyone wanted improvement, but no one knew where to start.

► IMPLEMENTATION

John Marshall's journey of school improvement started with a book study. The school leadership team used the book *Learning by Doing* as a guide to how to become a successful, sustainable professional learning community. Building a collaborative culture was an important first step. Teachers worked in teams to become more strategic. Key agenda items were addressed and followed up with action.

With the support of Dr. Sharon V. Kramer, their on-site coach, the staff of John Marshall delved deeper into their improvement efforts. What started as simply preparing for Dr. Kramer's visits became the daily culture of doing business at school. Teachers started to break down learning standards and how they were going to assess students. They examined how the blueprints for state tests aligned with what was taught in class. Soon, teachers were able to look at student performance on an individual level. Interventions became more specific and intentional. "Every time Sharon visited we would uncover new things that we could improve," Carlson reflects.



Every time Dr. Kramer came out, we spent two intensive days digging into our data, our systems, how kids were placed in classes, how we handled remediation—everything. Every time we discovered new opportunities for improvement. We became more strategic when it came to how our practices would impact academic achievement. I know these strategic moves made a positive impact on our test results.”

—Aspasia Carlson, former principal, John Marshall Enterprise High School, Oklahoma

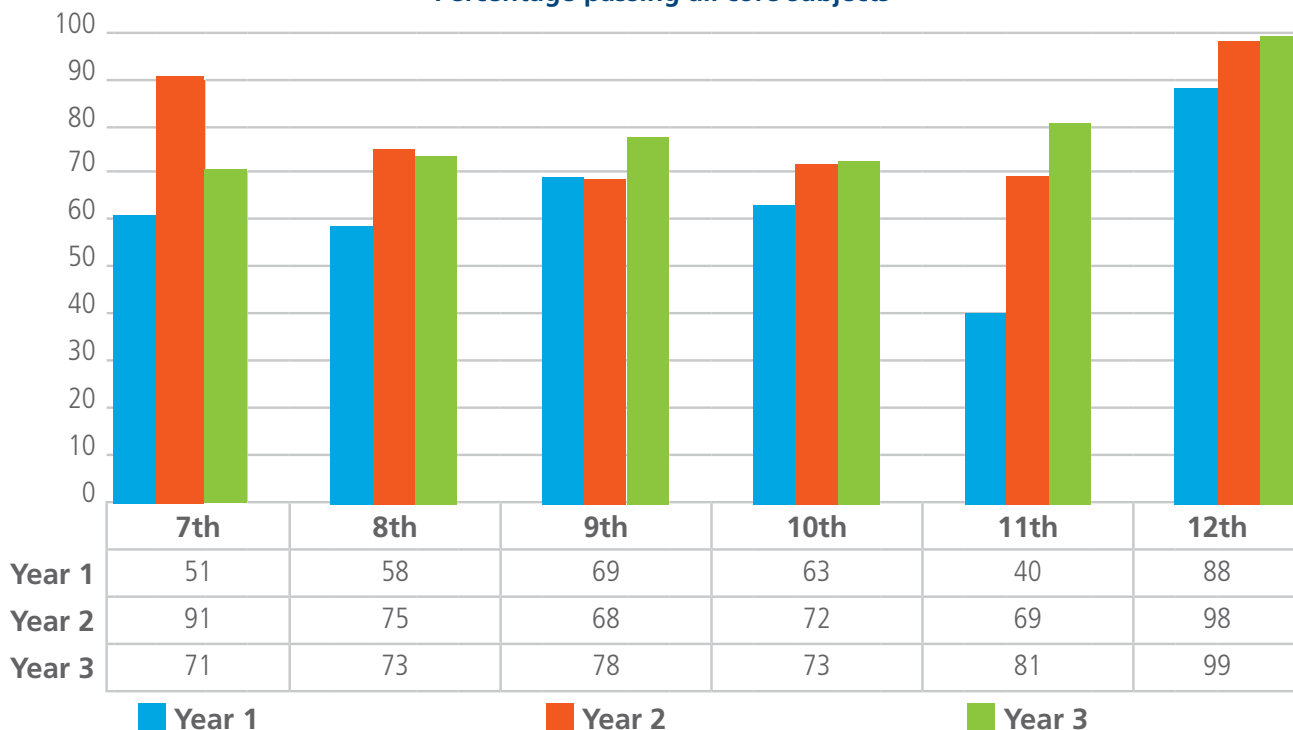
► RESULTS

Today, teachers are invested in the success of every student at John Marshall. Students are invested in their own learning too, using individual trackers to check their progress. This attention to the success of each child has impacted the overall performance of students at John Marshall. The percentage of students passing all core subjects is showing an upward trend. After digging into the data and responding to students’ needs in a more informed and targeted way, educators at John Marshall saw state test scores rise from 42% to 67%. In addition, students at John Marshall earned the top scores in biology in the district. Only one school, an application school, scored higher.



Specific and intentional interventions and extensions made a difference for John Marshall students.

Percentage passing all core subjects





U.S. Grant High School

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **123** teachers
- › **1,640** students
- › **89%** free and reduced lunch
- › **30%** English learners
- › **15%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **73%** Hispanic
- › **13%** White
- › **8%** Black
- › **1%** Asian; Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander

U.S. Grant High School is the largest school in Oklahoma City Public Schools, a multicultural district serving approximately 43,000 students.



► CHALLENGE

The culture and media surrounding U.S. Grant High School has been historically negative. The school has been called a “dropout factory” and “ground zero of education reform in Oklahoma.” According to the Oklahoma City Police Department, five of the six known gangs in Oklahoma City reside within district boundaries. Staff spent their time focusing on compliance and order instead of student achievement.

The Oklahoma City Public School Board of Education designated U.S. Grant a Turnaround School and allocated additional funding under a School Improvement Grant. The following school year, U.S. Grant did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and was placed on the state “needs improvement” list for the sixth year in a row.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Under the leadership of former Principal Tamie Sanders (currently director of secondary Turnaround Schools), U.S. Grant began its journey to become a professional learning community (PLC). The staff have focused their efforts on monitoring student learning on a timely basis, creating systems of intervention, and building teacher capacity to work as members of high-performing collaborative teams.

Teacher teams develop common assessments based on appropriate learning objectives and depth of knowledge. The teams give the assessments to students in a consistent manner and analyze the results for effective instructional strategies, curricular improvement areas, and student strengths/weaknesses. This drives instruction, which is supported by a team approach to enrichment and remediation. Following are some of the interventions teams use to provide additional time and support for learning:

1. Differentiated, tiered lessons
2. Flexible grouping among teachers to accommodate varying student learning levels
3. Intercession opportunities to remediate and allow students opportunities for success
4. Plans created and monitored for each senior to meet graduation requirements

“Solution Tree helped expand how we utilize PLC time by guiding us to create group intervention plans; become vertically aligned; and use benchmarks, common assessments, and state exam data to identify students in need of intervention. The student achievement gains U.S. Grant has made in recent years were possible because we became a team of teachers, instead of individual teachers, with a clearly defined path to reach our goals.”

—Maria Wartchow, teacher, U.S. Grant High School, Oklahoma

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Department chairs and team leaders are strategically selected based on collaborative and leadership skills, not seniority. These leaders participate in ongoing training to further develop their facilitation skills. Leaders and administrators regularly participate in the schoolwide leadership team and monitor the protocols of the department collaborative teams.

Protocols include:

1. Establish and review SMART goals.
2. Focus on the four critical PLC questions in an effective and efficient manner.
3. Use effective frequent common assessments that truly measure and monitor learning.
4. Analyze data to the student level.
5. Monitor for conflicts and barriers that get in the way of student learning.

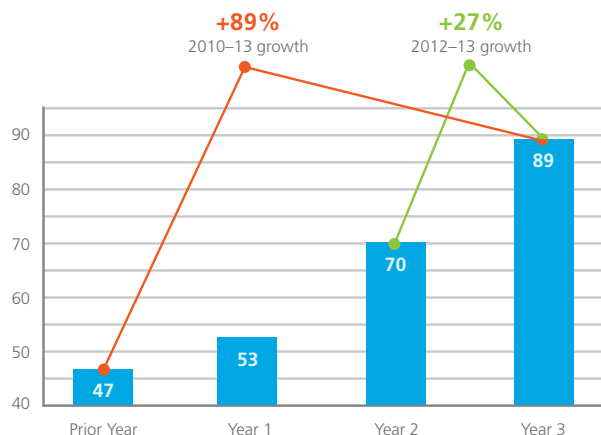
► RESULTS

In Oklahoma, seniors must pass a minimum of four (of seven) End-of-Instruction (EOI) tests to graduate. At the start of Year 2 of implementation, 204 seniors had not met the state testing requirements for graduation. Administrators, counselors, and teachers analyzed the data on each senior to ensure they had the maximum opportunities and resources to meet the state requirements. The school focused on student learning and improving the culture simultaneously. Word began to spread of the positive changes going on at the school, with local news channel News 9 reporting that “Principal Sanders and her staff transformed the culture of Grant.” By the end of the Year 2, only four seniors

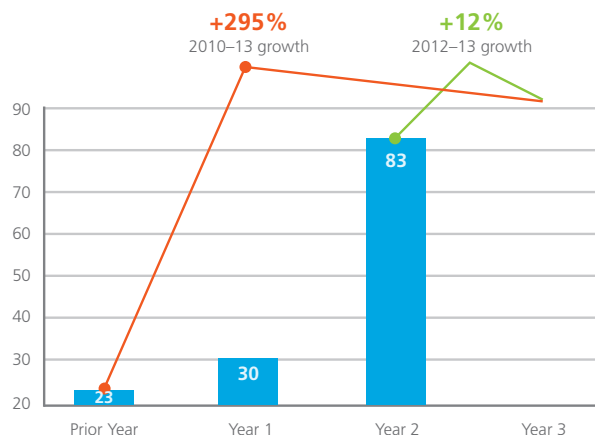
had not met the state testing requirements, and 35 seniors passed all seven EOI assessments.

The academic growth that occurred during Year 2 made a huge impact and ignited motivation for continued improvement. The unprecedented success of that year’s seniors raised the bar for all students. In Year 3, the number of seniors not meeting state graduation requirements was reduced to 85 compared to 204 for the previous year. In Year 4, U.S. Grant had 117 seniors who passed all seven EOI tests, with an additional 35 who needed to pass just one more test to have passed all seven.

English III Year-to-Year Comparison:
Percent of students who passed End-of-Instruction (EOI) Assessment



Algebra I Year-to-Year Comparison:
Percent of students who passed End-of-Instruction (EOI) Assessment





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Assessment
COLLABORATIVE

Tom Schimmer, Nicole Dimich, Cassandra Erkens,
authors, educators, co-creators of
Assessment Collaborative

Assessment literacy offers hope, efficacy, and achievement

By Cassandra Erkens, Nicole Dimich, and Tom Schimmer

Each of the three of us can unequivocally state that it is both a thrill and an honor to enhance the assessment literacy of so many dedicated educators who are striving to offer hope, increase efficacy, and improve achievement for students and staff alike.

Oftentimes, people begin an assessment literacy journey believing that our team of associates has arrived to improve tests and testing results. While those things do happen over time, our core focus is on the depth and breadth of all things assessment. Once clientele realize that assessment is a process that touches everything they do—from informed decision making to inspired teaching to engaged learning and everything in between—they quickly become as devoted to the work as we are!

The tenets of our Assessment Collaborative's framework cover all of the key considerations teachers and administrators must address as they accurately design and effectively employ assessments at the local level.

Our evidence of effectiveness continues to emerge from passionate educators who are willing to engage in action research as they embed best practices. Their results, in turn, inspire us! When educators keep focused intention on their assessment efforts, everything—culture, processes, products, and results—improves.

We can't wait to be part of your journey too!



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Kildeer Countryside Community Consolidated School District 96

BUFFALO GROVE, ILLINOIS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **3,333** students
- › **9%** free and reduced lunch
- › **19%** English learners
- › **11%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **46.1%** White
- › **38.9%** Asian
- › **8.1%** Hispanic
- › **4.5%** Multiracial
- › **2.3%** Black
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Kildeer Countryside Community Consolidated School District 96 is located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Illinois.



PLC AT WORK
MODEL SCHOOL



Students collaborate on in-class work.

► CHALLENGE

Early in Kildeer Countryside Community Consolidated School District 96's professional learning community (PLC) journey, administrators recognized that as a system they did not have clear answers to the four critical questions of a PLC. There was a lack of consistency regarding what students learned, and while assessment existed in the system, it was used to determine student grades, not to inform instructional practice. This realization led to a focus on the four questions as the basis of the district's school improvement processes and remains the focus today. As Kildeer continues its journey, answers to the four questions get sharper and more refined, leading to higher levels of student achievement.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Kildeer's implementation strategies began with the first question: what is it we expect our students to learn? Their work centered around the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum districtwide. Using state standards, and then later the Common Core Standards, district teams worked to determine the essential standards and learning targets for every content area at every grade level throughout the system. From there, teams developed trimester pacing guides to ensure there was a common instructional focus in all grades for all content areas in the district. The next step was focused on the second question: how will we know when they have learned it? Teacher teams worked together to develop common formative assessments and district benchmark assessments to measure student progress and establish appropriate instruction, interventions, and extensions. Teacher teams continue to refine and expand this work every year.



Many Solution Tree authors and researchers have worked with District 96 throughout this journey, shaping our work and contributing to our progress. Through Solution Tree's guidance, we believe we have built a premier school district where we strive to ensure that every student achieves, every day in every school."

—Jeanne Spiller, assistant superintendent, Kildeer Countryside Community Consolidated School District 96, Illinois

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

"One of the most impactful steps in the system has been scaling targets," principal Vail Kieser, a former technology coach, says. "This collaborative process allows us to gain a deep understanding of learning

targets which ultimately blossoms into addressing the following questions: What can we do if a child doesn't know the target to meet standards? What can we do if a child already knows the target?"

► RESULTS

For 12 years, Kildeer saw a steady rise in districtwide average Illinois Standards Achievement Test scores. In the twelfth year, Kildeer scored 108.1 on the ISAT index compared to the statewide index of 100. Most impressive is the comparison of ISAT indices based on students with individualized education plans. Compared to the statewide score of 89.9, Kildeer achieved an index of 101.5. Across Kildeer, IEP reading scores increased from 62.3% to 81.8% over a period of nine years. IEP math scores increased from 66.9% to 87.7% during that same period.

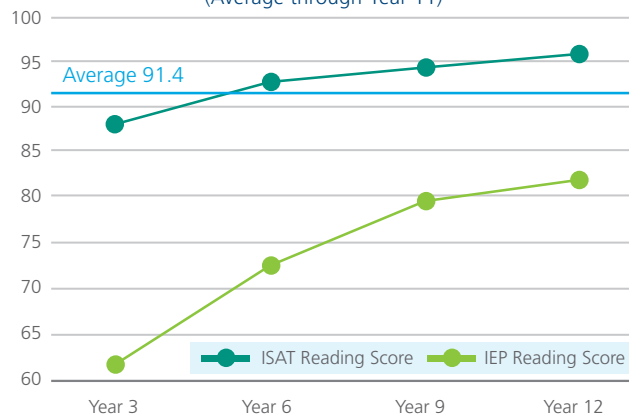
In Year 4, Kildeer ranked 54th out of 868 districts in Illinois. Between Year 4 and Year 12, the district improved its state rank each year, and in Year 12, the school ranked 8th in the state. Kieser attributes these increased levels of student achievement to the assessment strategies implemented over the last decade: "Assessment in

District 96 is one of the most powerful tools we have to promote critical thinking by teachers, set high expectations for all students, and ultimately provide clarity and common language for all who have a stake in developing students' maximum potential."

Rethinking the way they assess has provided other benefits, according to Kieser. "Through multiple methods of assessment, we provide check-in points to promote assessment for learning versus solely of learning. This provides teachers, coaches, and building principals an opportunity to examine current practices, help each other solve problems, and provide the best possible learning opportunities for students. Coming from a classroom position to a coaching role, I understand how deeply our methods of assessment positively benefit learning in our district."

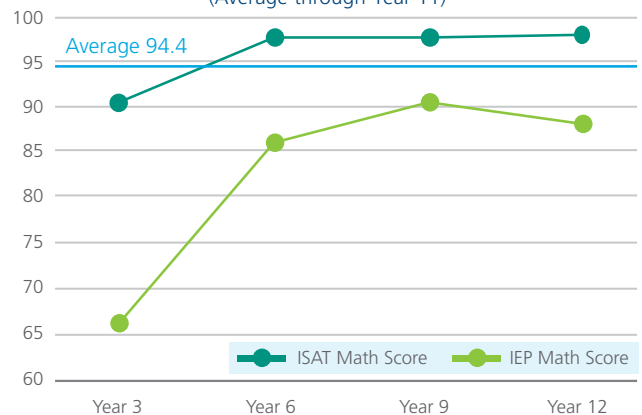
District ISAT and IEP Reading Scores Years 3–12

(Average through Year 11)



District ISAT and IEP Math Scores Years 3–12

(Average through Year 11)



Mildred M. Hawk Elementary School

CORINTH, TEXAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **730** students
- › **9%** free and reduced lunch
- › **2%** English learners
- › **8%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **12%** Hispanic
- › **5%** Black
- › **5%** Multiracial
- › **4%** Asian; Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- › **1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Mildred M. Hawk Elementary School is located in Corinth, Texas, a suburban area north of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. It is currently the largest elementary school in the Denton Independent School District. The elementary schools in the district are designed to serve up to 650 students, but in recent years, Hawk's enrollment has reached as high as 830 students.



► CHALLENGE

As Mildred M. Hawk Elementary staff worked to become a professional learning community (PLC), they tackled tough conversations about assessment practices. They began working with assessment expert Cassandra Erkens. Focusing on the question “How do we know when students have learned it?” teachers began digging deeply into how to identify mastery. What they found was a lack of alignment between assessing and recording mastery of essential standards.

This misalignment impacted student learning. Third-grade students were demonstrating a lack of readiness for state assessments. They also routinely underperformed in comparison with fourth- and fifth-grade students, especially in math. To address this, vertical teacher teams were created to collectively assess student problem-solving and thinking.

Other areas of focus included how to better prepare rigorous common assessments and how to report on them to all stakeholders, including students, parents, and colleagues. As staff began to read and study more about effective use of assessment, they realized they needed tools to help guide instruction.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Hawk Elementary staff received customized on-site coaching. Specific guidance given during PLC team meetings focused on effective practices for engaging students with learning targets, writing rubrics to measure proficiency, and engaging students in collaboration to make student-friendly rubrics. One of the most powerful strategies teams learned was to score student work collaboratively.

In addition, teachers have worked together to unpack the state standards; evaluate each standard for its relevance in the areas of endurance, leverage, and readiness; and identify the most essential standards to measure for mastery. Once the essentials were identified, the teachers designed a standards-based report card to communicate these standards to all stakeholders.



Working with Cassandra Erkens allowed me, as the campus leader, to pull together a variety of best practices and research for the teachers I serve. I felt confident this was the most effective training to support student learning.”

—Susannah O’Bara, former principal, Mildred M. Hawk Elementary School, Texas

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

Each standard reported has a common assessment designed to assess for student mastery. Each assessment has an accompanying rubric designed to communicate expectations to students and measure performance when the task is complete. Teachers then work as

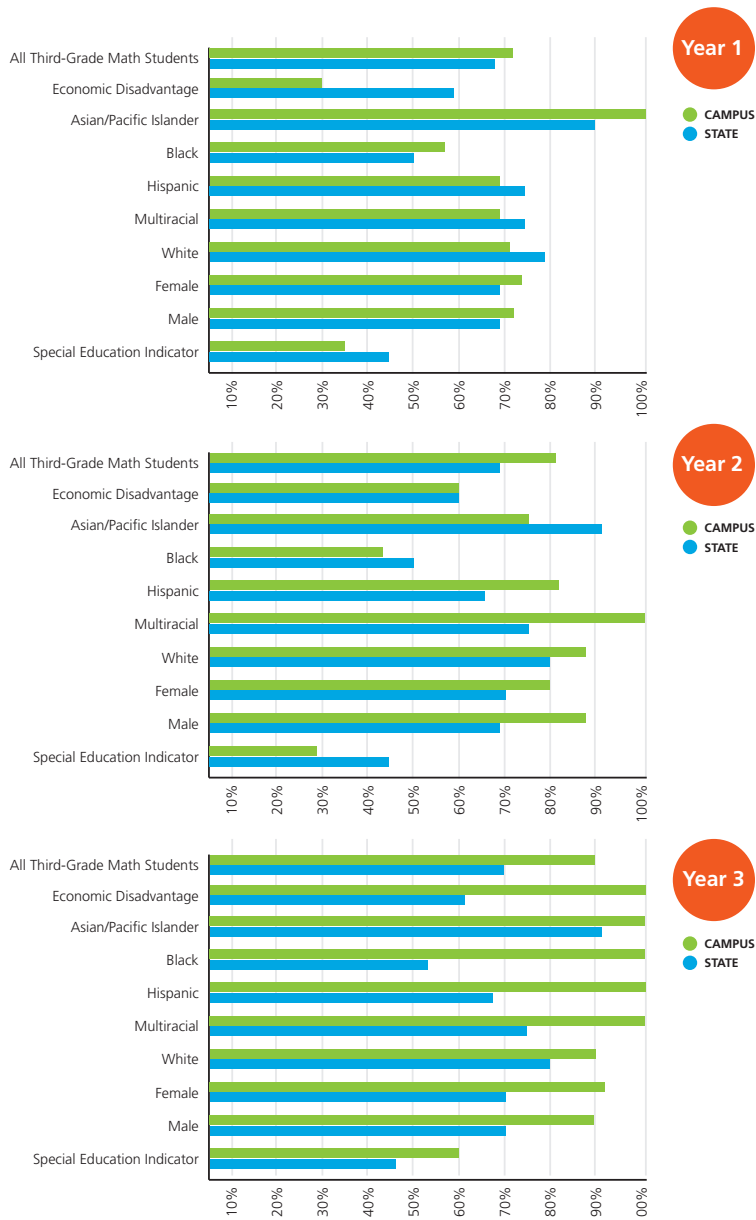
teams to develop common formative assessments to use throughout instruction to monitor student learning from day to day. Teachers use weekly PLC meetings to review formative and summative assessments and make decisions about interventions.

► RESULTS

After Hawk Elementary initiated a standards-based grading and reporting system, the entire district worked to transition to this system. All elementary schools in the Denton ISD currently use a standards-based report card, and all secondary schools are implementing standards-based grading. This change in grading and reporting has clarified learning objectives for staff, students, and the community.

Although Hawk Elementary transitioned to a more rigorous state assessment, the practices they learned enabled them to maintain high student achievement. Students have learned to take ownership of their learning by using feedback and tracking their progress through a variety of tools developed by teachers with the support of Solution Tree experts.

“Cassandra Erkens provided us the tools needed to dig deeply into the standards, break them apart, and collaboratively determine proficiency of these standards,” says former principal and current area superintendent of Denton ISD Susannah O’Bara. “She also guided us in becoming an assessment-literate campus. Now, we facilitate deep learning of rigorous standards for our students. All teachers work in teams to design common formative assessments, and they use these assessments to guide instruction and maximize student achievement daily.”





Moriarty Elementary School

MORIARTY, NEW MEXICO

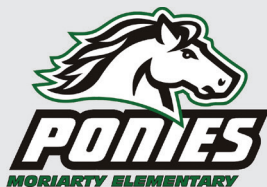
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 465 students
- › 100% free and reduced lunch
- › 8% English learners
- › 20% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 53.1% Hispanic
- › 5% Multiracial
- › 1% American Indian or Alaska Native

Moriarty Elementary School is located in a rural area 45 miles east of Albuquerque, New Mexico.



► CHALLENGE

Using the adopted curriculum assessment materials only, student achievement at Moriarty was stagnant. Former principal Natalie Romero says, “Not only were teachers using only curriculum assessment materials, they were using curriculum materials to teach. This process did not aid in student achievement, as seen in the last five years of school data.” Teams faced the challenge of increasing student achievement with poorly created, non-Common Core-aligned assessments. As a result, even though staff members were functioning as a productive professional learning community, the effectiveness of their instruction could never advance students.

Another challenge was the absence of student-centered rubrics and grading. Students had no involvement in planning their learning and no opportunities for reflection.

► IMPLEMENTATION

With the help of assessment expert Cassandra Erkens, teams began unpacking assessments to ensure they were asking meaningful questions of students. They identified essential standards in order to create quality assessments. Through the backward-planning process, teams used the assessments they created as common summative



Focusing on assessments allows us to dive down and figure out what students really need and what we need to do to close the gaps. As a result, Moriarty has seen overall student proficiency in reading increase from 35% to 57% in one school year.”

—Natalie Romero, district director and former principal, Moriarty Elementary School, New Mexico

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

assessments to determine proficiency based on the standards, not the curriculum. Teachers also began placing the students in charge of their learning, developing student-friendly rubrics with aligned learning targets. This created a clear picture for students and outlined exactly what was expected of them.

Finally, teachers began scoring assessments together in order to streamline common expectations and rubrics.

“Our PLC time moved from only looking at assessment scores to having meaningful conversations about creating assessments and teaching strategies to assist all students in obtaining proficiency,” Romero says. “While teams are at different places on the journey of assessment, each team in the building has begun to create common assessments and to collaboratively score assessments in at least one academic area.”

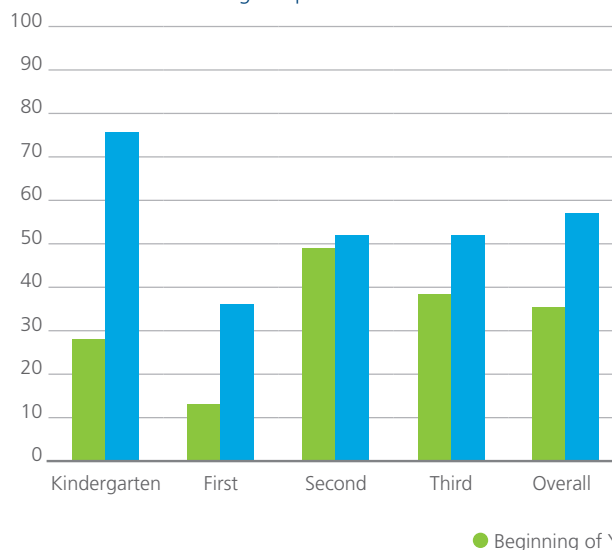
► RESULTS

Through their work on assessments with Erkens, teams were able to pinpoint areas of need specific to each student by each standard. Teachers have developed the knowledge and understanding to assess test quality and create assessments that are aligned with the Common Core Standards. “The process we learned gave me the understanding of what a good assessment actually looks like and what it can measure,” says Romero.

Students have also been given the opportunity to reflect on their achievement through data tracking and learning targets. Over the spring semester, learning increased drastically based on short-cycle assessment results and classroom summative assessments. Teachers know exactly where students are, regarding their proficiency on the standards now. In the past, student proficiency was based solely on curriculum standards. The focus on assessment inspired teams to become more efficient in their collaboration, creating strong and healthy teams.

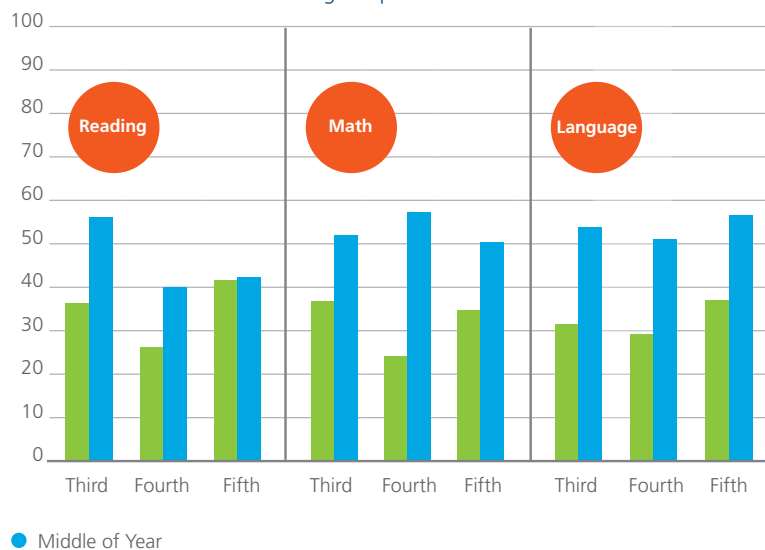
DIBELS Reading Assessment

Percentage of proficient students



MAPS- NWEA- Short Cycle Assessment

Percentage of proficient students

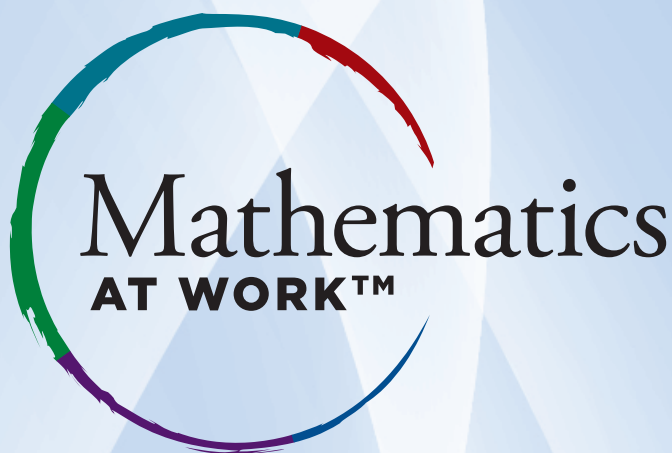


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<div>Keynote</div> <hr/> <div>A Call to Action</div> <hr/> <div>Making Grades Fair, Meaningful, and Equitable</div>	<div>Collaborative Common Assessments</div> <hr/> <div>Rethinking Grading to Develop Confident Learners</div> <hr/> <div>Developing Creative Processes in the Classroom through Formative Assessment</div> <hr/> <div>Coaching Students in the Classroom through Effective Feedback</div> <hr/> <div>Student Self-Assessment</div> <hr/> <div>Grading From the Inside Out</div> <hr/> <div>Design in Five</div> <hr/> <div>Growing Tomorrow's Citizens in Today's Classrooms</div>	<div>Developing Assessment Literacy</div> <hr/> <div>Implementing and Affirming with Evidence</div> <hr/> <div>Embedded Practice, Systems Alignment, and Sustainability</div> <hr/> <div>Customized Services</div> <hr/> <div>Embedded Coaching</div> <hr/> <div>Global PD Teams</div> <hr/> <div>Assessment as a Catalyst for Learning</div> <hr/> <div>Coaching Academy</div>
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All training is delivered by Assessment Collaborative authors and their certified associates.



Timothy D. Kanold, author, educator, creator of Mathematics at Work

When teachers work collectively, student performance soars

By Timothy D. Kanold

The most promising and effective teacher professional development process supports teacher grade level or course-based collaboration, provides expert coaching and support, incorporates active and ongoing teacher engagement, uses research-affirmed models of practice, and is of sustained duration.

This exact process for improved student achievement is used by our Mathematics in a PLC at Work® leaders, associates, and preK–12 schools and teams. Our success stories are on full display at our annual national Mathematics in a PLC at Work Summit, representing over 100 preK–12 teams, schools or districts across more than 35 states.

Overcoming these odds stacked against improving student mathematics performance, developing student agency and disposition to do mathematics is the primary reason I started the Mathematics in a PLC at Work professional development program at Solution Tree in 2010. To personally experience the sustained implementation processes for improvement to a district's mathematics units' standards, tasks, instruction, assessments, homework, and interventions has been beyond my greatest expectations. It is both humbling and rewarding when teachers work collectively, to achieve the following actions, and then watch as student performance soars!

1. Tier 1 Instruction: Implement daily classroom learning routines and actions with Tier 1 interventions during student engagement activities.
2. Common Assessments with Tier 2 Interventions: Create and use high-quality unit-by-unit assessments, formative feedback routines, and targeted plans for a Tier 2 intervention response.
3. Essential Standards and Rigor: Create unit-by-unit plans with appropriate rigor and common pacing guides.
4. Team Data Analysis: Analyze, respond, and use unit-by-unit data to impact student continuous learning and teachers' daily decision making.
5. Grading routines: Implement grading practices that accurately measure, inspire, and improve overall student performance and proficiency.

It is exciting to think about the success stories ahead, knowing students will be the beneficiaries of our joint efforts with these schools and districts.



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Anoka-Hennepin School District

ANOKA, MINNESOTA

DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 52 schools
- › 38,230 students
- › 35.6% free and reduced lunch
- › 6.4% English learners
- › 12.9% special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › 11.2% Black
- › 7.3% Asian; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › 4.5% Hispanic
- › 1.4% American Indian or Alaska Native

The Anoka-Hennepin School District is Minnesota's largest, serving approximately 38,000 students and 248,000 residents. Anoka-Hennepin has 24 elementary schools, 6 middle schools (grades 6–8), and 5 high schools, plus alternative middle and high school sites, an award-winning secondary technical education program, and an online high school.



► CHALLENGE

The faculty at the five high schools in the Anoka-Hennepin School District needed to work together to focus their energy on substantial changes in mathematics instruction and assessment. Student proficiencies on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) were below state average with a combined percentage of 26%. Coon Rapids High School had the lowest proficiency of all five high schools and the highest percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Former assistant superintendent of high schools Jeff McGonigal—who was principal of Coon Rapids at the time—wanted those results to change.

After meeting Dr. Timothy D. Kanold and hearing about the Mathematics at Work™ strategies teachers and administrators could implement to impact student achievement, McGonigal believed that this could be the change that would drive continuous improvement in Anoka-Hennepin.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Dr. Kanold and nine of his Mathematics at Work colleagues came to Anoka-Hennepin, working on site in each high school and middle school with course-based teacher teams. They visited classrooms, providing meaningful and timely feedback. They also provided a full day of assessment professional development: writing quality exams, creating

“Tim Kanold and his colleagues helped our teachers look at student data in a different way. Now, they work in collaborative teams to get real meaning from the assessments and use the information to improve instruction in all classrooms for all students.”

—Jeff McGonigal, former assistant superintendent of high schools, Anoka-Hennepin School District, Minnesota

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

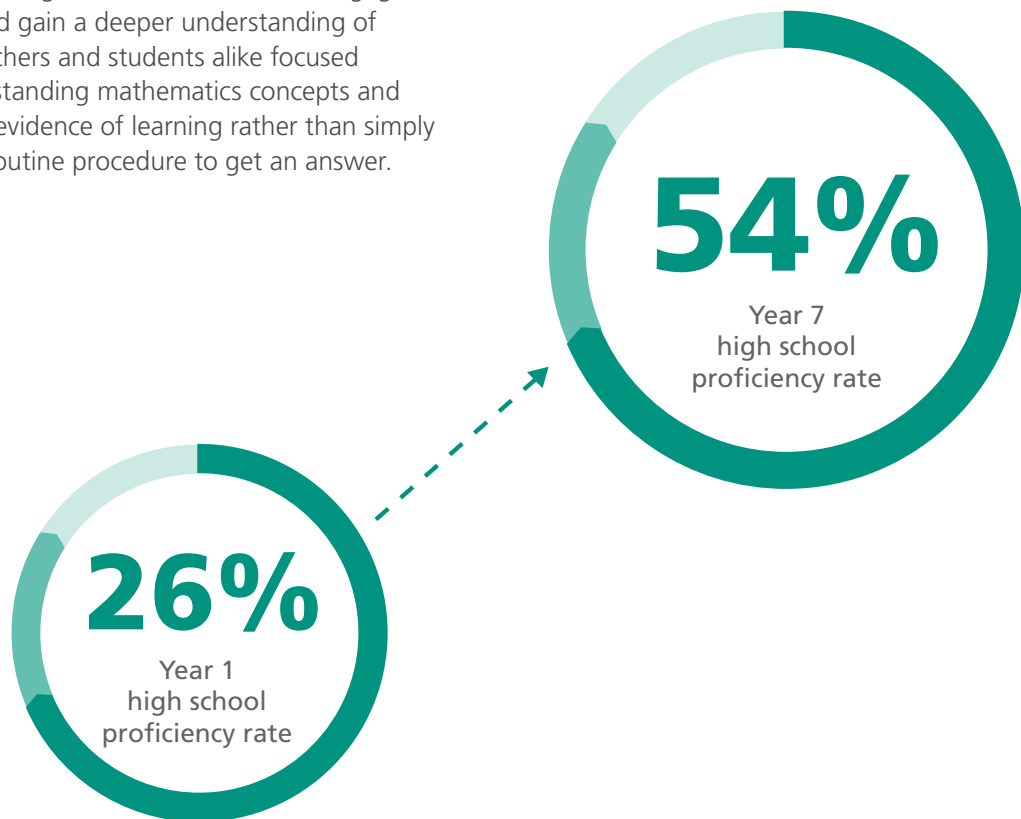
effective homework assignments, and conducting lesson studies. Their constructive feedback inspired reflection among the teachers and led to more effective mathematics assessment and instruction throughout the district.

Dr. Kanold also reviewed the overall mathematics program and provided an analysis for the district. Over time, he observed a shift away from the all-too-common routine mathematics teachers fall into—starting the class with a review of last night’s homework, presenting the next concept from the front of the room, then assigning a new lesson. The Anoka-Hennepin faculty worked with the Mathematics at Work team to use more effective in-class teaching strategies and end-of-unit assessment strategies. Eventually, students worked more in peer teams on higher-cognitive-demand tasks to engage one another and gain a deeper understanding of their work. Teachers and students alike focused more on understanding mathematics concepts and demonstrating evidence of learning rather than simply memorizing a routine procedure to get an answer.

► RESULTS

The effort of the Anoka-Hennepin middle school and high school teachers has shown steady progress over the past several years. High school student proficiency rates rose from 26% to 54% in the span of seven years. McGonigal, who is now retired, reflects on the changes he’s observed among the teachers:

“You see teachers collaborating more than they ever have in the past. Before, unit test scores were quickly reviewed and the teachers moved on. Now, teachers are working together to see who has the best results. Whoever has success with a particular strategy shares that strategy with other members of the team. They get more meaning from the data and use it to continuously improve instruction.”



Clark County School District

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **352** schools
- › **314,636** students
- › **58%** free and reduced lunch
- › **23%** English learners
- › **11%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **44%** Hispanic
- › **29%** White
- › **12%** Black
- › **7%** Asian
- › **6%** Multiracial
- › **2%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **0.5%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Clark County School District is the fifth-largest school system in the nation.



Clark County School District students and faculty

► CHALLENGE

Prior to Clark County School District's improvement journey, 24,000 students enrolled in grade 6–12 mathematics participated in a districtwide semester common assessment. The exams covered five core college prep mathematics courses: middle school pre-algebra and honors algebra, and high school algebra, geometry, and advanced algebra II. Only 9% of the students enrolled in high school algebra I passed.

The results grabbed headlines and the attention of all stakeholders. The superintendent responded by establishing an expert mathematics committee that partnered building- and district-level staff with national K–12 mathematics education expert Dr. Timothy D. Kanold. The committee was tasked with forging a plan that would lead the entire district on a continuous growth and improvement journey.

► IMPLEMENTATION

In spring of that year, the district launched efforts to improve mathematics professional development and learning with a clear directive from stakeholders. The mathematics committee anchored their work with nonnegotiable goals established through a collaborative process involving key stakeholders.



Our staff benefited greatly from Dr. Kanold's expertise in creating high-quality assessments, setting SMART goals, determining mathematics course offerings, and fine-tuning the process for student placements into high school mathematics courses."

—Eric Johnson, former director of mathematics and instructional technology, Clark County School District, Nevada

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

The committee examined trend data for student pass-rate performance and grade distribution rates. Then, they used consensus building to establish both long- and short-term goals. Using the SMART goal protocol ensured that goals would fit seamlessly into the established district improvement plan.

Next, the committee studied vital teacher actions linked to improved student achievement and worked to close the knowing-doing gap districtwide. Professional development for department chairs included creating and implementing SMART goal plans, high-performing teacher teams, mathematics-specific instructional designs, and highly effective classroom assessment practices. New and vital district behaviors included changing RTI to be purposeful and nonnegotiable in preparing students early for semester common assessments.

► RESULTS

In January of Year 2 and again in January of Year 3, the committee led a review of school-by-school performance on SMART goal expectations and action plans for each site and districtwide. The data review included semester grades and the semester common assessment pass rate. Two years of focused efforts resulted in new levels of student performance. A review of first-semester common assessment data in Year 3 revealed that 15,000 more students passed the exams than would have passed based on Year 1 levels of proficiency. Paying attention to results and acting on those results was rewarded by short-term improvement.

The district continues to ensure all aspects of the teaching and learning environment are monitored for improvement. The ongoing challenge is to provide transparency in all areas of such a large district, but the committee believes this is essential to sustain teaching behaviors that impact student learning. Next steps include deep inspection of the teaching culture and learning at schools that need to improve, providing just-in-time resources to classrooms with struggling students. The underlying support to these districtwide improvement efforts will be continuous, job-embedded professional learning, as research indicates top-performing school systems "improve instruction by moving teacher training to the classroom."

Common Assessment Pass-Rate Goal:

We will increase the high school algebra I common assessment pass rate to 80% in three years

Short-Term Goal Achievement

From Year 1 to Year 3, algebra I percent pass rate improved from 9% to 21%.

Grade Distribution Goal:

We will decrease the middle school pre-algebra D/F rate to 10% in four years.

Short-Term Goal Achievement

From Year 1 to Year 3, the middle school D/F rate decreased from 37% to 33%.

Kanold, T., & Ebert, J. (2010, October). 1 district, 1 set of math goals. *Journal of Staff Development*, 31(5), 12–16.



Phoenix Union High School District

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

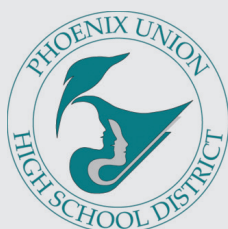
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **1,670** teachers
- › **27,031** students
- › **84.7%** free and reduced lunch
- › **3.6%** English learners
- › **47.9%** Spanish primary language
- › **11.4%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **80.1%** Hispanic
- › **9%** Black
- › **5.3%** White
- › **2.5%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **2%** Asian; Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- › **1.2%** Other

Phoenix Union High School District is one of the largest high school districts in the United States, with 16 schools and nearly 3,000 employees. Phoenix Union covers 220 square miles of Arizona's capital city. The district has 11 comprehensive high schools, two specialty small schools, and three alternative schools.



Mathematics educators focus on next steps for improving instruction.

► CHALLENGE

Ten years ago, 60% of incoming freshmen at Phoenix Union High School District were placed in below-grade-level mathematics courses, while access to upper-level courses was for a select few (less than 15%). When Phoenix Union's vision was updated in the spring of that year to *"preparing every student for success in college, career, and life,"* the district needed to create structures to support students in junior- and senior-level courses.

The district also needed to bridge the gap between eighth-grade outcomes and freshman readiness, to ensure student success in the first year of high school.

► IMPLEMENTATION

The district contracted with Dr. Timothy D. Kanold and the Mathematics at Work™ team to support mathematics teachers in creating and implementing a professional learning community. The first year of training focused on developing engaging student learning opportunities and discovering how to work in collaborative teams. The second year focused on building teacher capacity to implement high-quality mathematics instruction and assessment through leadership training and on-site work at several targeted high schools.

On-site school coaches from the Mathematics at Work team, including Dr. Kanold, Donna Simpson Leak, and Kit Norris, worked with Phoenix Union's school leaders and course-based collaborative teams to develop the following:





As a brand-new leader, I had the support from Tim Kanold and other leaders across the district to have an open and honest conversation about our reality and how we could improve. Every time I got back from leadership training, I was rejuvenated for the next cycle of teaching.”

—Jeanette Scott, instructional leader, Phoenix Union High School District, Arizona

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

► Intro to high school summer program

Increasing the number of students ready for algebra

► Algebra and geometry qualifying tests

Increasing the number of students entering beyond algebra I as ninth graders to increase upper-level mathematics enrollment

► Collaborative team time

Increasing collaborative team time to develop common assessments and common homework expectations that promote academic advancement in mathematics for all students

► Tier 1 and Tier 2 formative assessment interventions

Supporting students at all levels of learning by increasing accessibility to higher-level mathematics courses

► Leadership training

Training for every high school mathematics team leader in the district

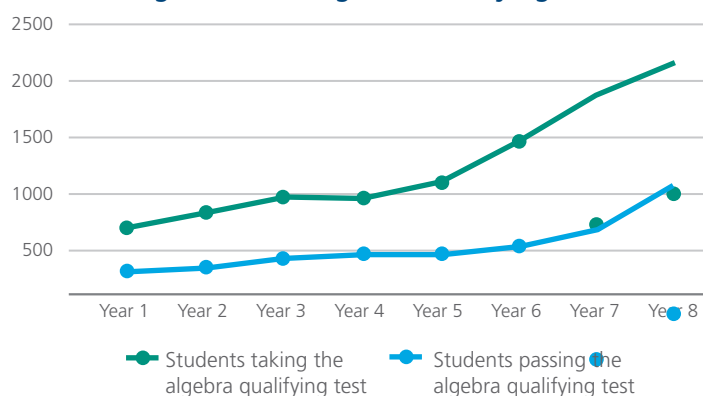
► Assessment training

Training for all mathematics teachers on how to create high-quality unit assessments aligned with the standards and how to use those assessments for formative student learning and accurate grading

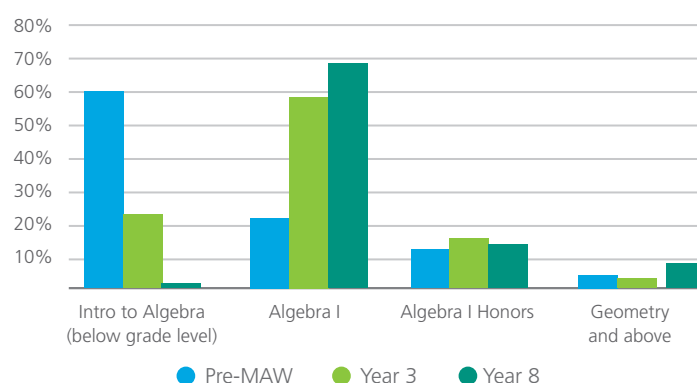
► RESULTS

With support from the Mathematics at Work team, Phoenix Union focused on giving students access to the full range of mathematics courses offered by the district. The mantra changed from “Only a few will be college and career ready,” to “What support can we provide so that all students are college and career ready?” These gains reflect collaborative efforts to ensure high-quality instruction, timely and effective interventions, and clear communication of expectations for academic behaviors.

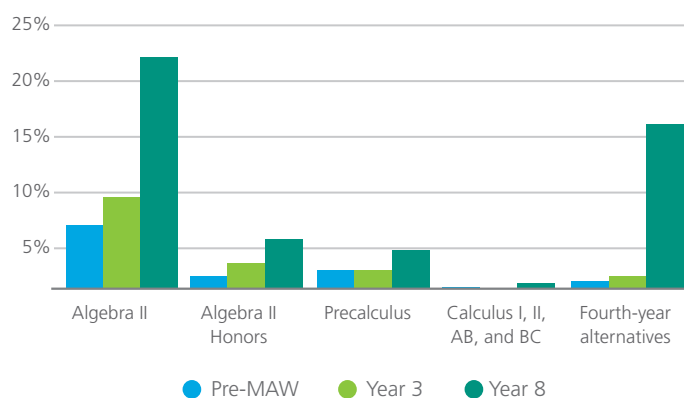
Eighth-Grade Algebra Qualifying Test



Ninth-Grade Mathematics Enrollment



Upper-Level Mathematics Enrollment





Newhall School District

VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA

DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **6,537** students
- › **23.5%** English learners
- › **12%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **48.4%** Hispanic
- › **30.5%** White
- › **9.5%** Asian
- › **5.8%** Multiracial
- › **2.3%** Black
- › **0.4%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Newhall School District is a group of ten elementary schools located in Valencia, California, a neighborhood of approximately 61,000 residents in Santa Clarita, California.



► CHALLENGE

When superintendent Jeff Pelzel first arrived at the Newhall School District, Common Core State Standards for literacy and math instruction were also being rolled out across California.

Pelzel, then an assistant superintendent and content director for Newhall, knew that finding the right instruction strategy for its 10 elementary schools—five of which were classified as Title I—would be critical to student success. Approximately 30% of Newhall's students at that time were English learners, and around 45% of students came from an economically disadvantaged background.

"Every other district around here adopted its math curriculum early, but I knew what was available was not good for us, so we delayed and delayed," Pelzel said.

After attending an Association of California School Administrators workshop, as well as watching Timothy D. Kanold's breakout session at a PLC at Work® Institute, Pelzel said he knew he had found the answer.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Sarah Schuhl, a certified Mathematics at Work™ associate, began working with Newhall to implement the 10 High-Leverage Team Actions detailed in the Mathematics Beyond the Common Core in a PLC at Work® series. Four teachers from each school were involved in the rollout process, ensuring consistent implementation across the entire district.

In Year 2, Schuhl met with every K–5 teacher, focusing an entire day on each grade level, three times during the school year to unwrap standards for upcoming mathematics curriculum units. The 10 High-Leverage Team Actions were reviewed before, during, and after each unit as well.

In Year 3, sixth-grade teachers met with Schuhl three times during the year to unwrap standards and create common assessments, and response to intervention (RTI) practices were created across the entire district, with a focus on Tier



“It’s been the most amazing relationship and partnership . . . Our teachers, they love teaching math, and the kids love it. They’re confident in what they’re doing now.”

—Jeff Pelzel, superintendent, Newhall School District, California

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

2 mathematics interventions. Schuhl also met with new teachers three times during the year to share mathematics instructional and assessment practices.

In Year 4, Schuhl met with special education teachers for mathematics training three times. Leadership teams also met with Schuhl to refine the RTI pyramid and implement strong core instruction using the ten team actions and the four critical questions of PLC at Work.

“If you’re going to invest in this work, it has to be about a long-term investment. Not one year, not two years, but a minimum of three-plus years of work,” Pelzel said. “If you can do that, you’re going to be in a much better situation.”

► RESULTS

After several years of involvement with the Mathematics at Work™ process, Newhall’s learners are showing incredible results with Common Core standards.

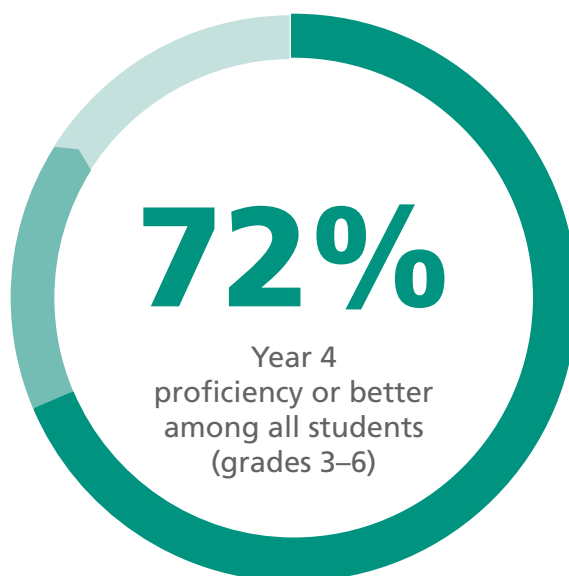
According to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, Newhall’s students collectively improved their proficiency in mathematics from 54% to 72% over three years. English proficiency also improved from 67% to 71% in that span.

“Despite our higher English learner numbers and higher poverty numbers, we are beating the odds and outperforming others around us with significantly lower numbers,” Pelzel said. “We know what the data typically tells us about poverty, and we are showing those odds can be beaten.”

As for Newhall’s economically disadvantaged students, 48.1% are now meeting or exceeding state math standards, compared to the Los Angeles County rate of 28.6%. Newhall’s English learner students are also outperforming the county 30.7% to 12%.

The progress at Newhall isn’t limited to test scores either. Pelzel said that some instructors now have more than 20 days of professional development backing up their hard work and that his district is united through the PLC at Work process, ensuring high levels of learning for all.

“Our teachers have bought into the philosophy around facilitating learning around kids, as well as using data to drive instruction and coaching to improve their practices,” Pelzel said. “To me, that’s what it’s all about.”



Kenwood Elementary School

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **576** students
- › **85%** free and reduced lunch
- › **44%** English learners
- › **11%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **39%** White
- › **28%** Black
- › **18%** Hispanic
- › **11%** Asian
- › **4%** Multiracial

Kenwood Elementary School is a Title 1 school within Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky. It is ranked among the top 20% of public schools in the state for both diversity and students eligible for free and reduced lunch. There are more than 30 countries and 24 languages represented among the student population. "It's a beautifully diverse place to be," says Kenwood principal Jill Handley.



► CHALLENGE

The year prior to partnering with Solution Tree, state test scores showed Kenwood Elementary mathematics proficiency to be near the lowest in the district at 18%. "This was such a devastating blow," admits principal Jill Handley. "I consider myself to be an instructional leader. I know instruction and what should be going on, but what it really came down to is that **we didn't have the systems and structures in place to move achievement.**"

When the opportunity arose for Kenwood to apply to be a pilot Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® school, Handley seized the chance. She knew her staff had what it took to tackle this work. "We already had common planning as part of our process, and most of us appreciated the idea of collaboration," says Handley. Kenwood was selected as one of 13 schools in the district to work with Solution Tree.

► IMPLEMENTATION

A lot of heavy lifting happened that first year in working with Mathematics at Work™ associate Mona Toncheff. "That was probably the hardest our staff has ever worked, aside from teaching through a pandemic," says Handley. **Teachers focused on deconstructing standards and creating common assessments. "They didn't just learn how to create common assessments," notes Toncheff, "but also how to score them so that every student's experience is equitable."**

In the beginning, their common assessments tended to focus on DOK level one. Assessments were tied to a low expectation of the standard and not the rigor of it. "That is definitely not the case now," observes Toncheff. Handley adds, "But since we had no common assessments prior, just that first step made a huge impact on student learning."

In year two, Toncheff dug into instructional shift and conducted lesson studies with every team in the school. "It was eye-opening for staff to be in each other's classrooms and observe how instructional choices like questioning and lesson design impacted student thinking" recalls Toncheff.

“One really great thing about working with Mona is that, even though we had a lot of work to do, she made it chunkable, giving us action steps to accomplish between our sessions with her. This allowed me to be in the boat with my teachers. It gave me the opportunity to hear this outside perspective and then lead and learn alongside my staff.”

—Jill Handley, principal, Kenwood Elementary School, Kentucky

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

“By this time our thinking was shifting in two major ways,” Handley adds. “One, we *no* longer were focusing so much on what the teacher is doing but on what the students are learning and applying. Two, we were learning what true collaboration looks like. We truly understood how to collectively look at the data for all our kids and respond effectively.”

Year 3 focused on refining their work on assessments and instruction. Kenwood staff also realized the value in the intensive conversations they were having around math content. Over the course of three years, the staff had started to think about and discuss what good math instruction and proficiency look like and then apply that thinking.

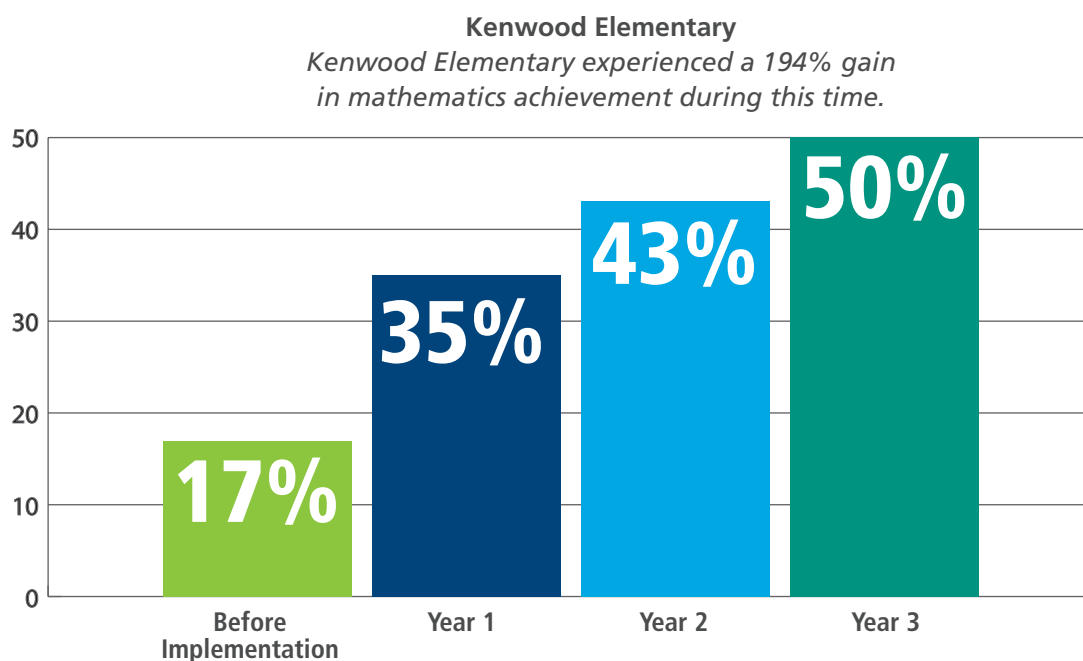
► RESULTS

After just one year of working with Toncheff and putting the basic tenets of Mathematics at Work in place, Kenwood doubled their overall mathematics proficiency. This significant, visible result motivated staff to keep going. By the end of Year 3, mathematics proficiency had risen to 50% from their starting point of 18%. This level of improvement earned Kenwood state recognition as one of 47 “bright spot” schools out of more than 1,000 applicants who showed higher than expected growth in mathematics achievement.

Other accolades include their status as the only school in Kentucky to be recognized as a National School of Character. Prior to the pandemic, Kenwood also boasted one of the top MAP growth indices out of

all Title I schools in Jefferson County Public Schools across all subgroups. In addition, Kenwood Elementary School became the first school in the district to be named a National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Distinguished School—one of only 100 schools in the country recognized for the distinction in that year.

According to a press release published by the district, “the school was identified by the Kentucky Department of Education and the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators for excellence in serving its English learner population.”





Emily Gray Junior High School

TUCSON, ARIZONA

DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **430** students
- › **3%** special education
- › **21%** free and reduced lunch

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **69%** White
- › **24%** Hispanic
- › **3%** Multiracial
- › **1%** Asian
- › **1%** Black
- › **1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Emily Gray Junior High School is a part of the Tanque Verde Unified School District, serving seventh and eighth grade. Driven by a commitment to academic excellence and lifelong learning, their mission is to foster a safe and supportive community where all students feel empowered to achieve academic success.



EMILY GRAY
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

► CHALLENGE

Throughout her term as the principal of Emily Gray Junior High School, Elizabeth Egan advocated for Solution Tree and the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process.

The entire Tanque Verde School District had already been working through the PLC process—and as a result, the school had gone from a C to an A—when Principal Egan realized the math team at Emily Gray needed more support to improve student achievement and move the needle on their proficiency levels. They also needed an additional math teacher on their team.

When Egan attended the annual Mathematics in a PLC at Work Summit, she discovered the perfect expert resource for her team.

Having a background in mathematics, Egan participated in the summit breakout sessions and was immediately impressed by educational presenter and author Mona Toncheff.

“Mona was talking about students and student learning and the power of why students need that conceptual understanding to see success. I’ve always believed in that understanding, but having someone else repeat it, I knew she was the person our math team needed on campus to drive that passion and excitement,” Egan said.

Inspired by Mona’s experience and genuine connection with people at the summit, Egan made it her mission to bring her expertise to Emily Gray Junior High School.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Egan’s math teachers were receptive to Mona’s ideas and embraced the professional development sessions. With guidance, Emily Gray began implementing practices to improve their assessments, interventions, and essential standards.

Collaborative teams worked to plan the school year and create proficiency maps to guide their learning targets. They further developed Professional Learning Team (PLT) documentation that allowed teachers to review Emily Gray’s mission and vision, school goals, team norms, and the four critical questions of a PLC.



“Thank you for creating a culture and environment where I feel safe to try new things and learn alongside the kids.”

—Kelyn Baechler, teacher, Emily Gray Junior High School, Arizona

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

The PLT documents also enabled teachers to follow individual student learning and provided strategies for improvement.

Math essentials classes for students needing additional support were also added.

Seeking to create meaningful tests that aligned with essential learning standards, the teachers implemented several strategies. They incorporated learning targets into each question, clearly labeling point values and the corresponding target for each. This transparency

provided students with a grounding point, allowing them to understand the purpose and value of each question.

To monitor student progress throughout each module, the seventh-grade math teacher team created a comprehensive spreadsheet tracking all CFAs and tests. This helped them design effective W.I.N. (What I Need) interventions for each student along with engaging extension activities they could include in their daily lesson plans.

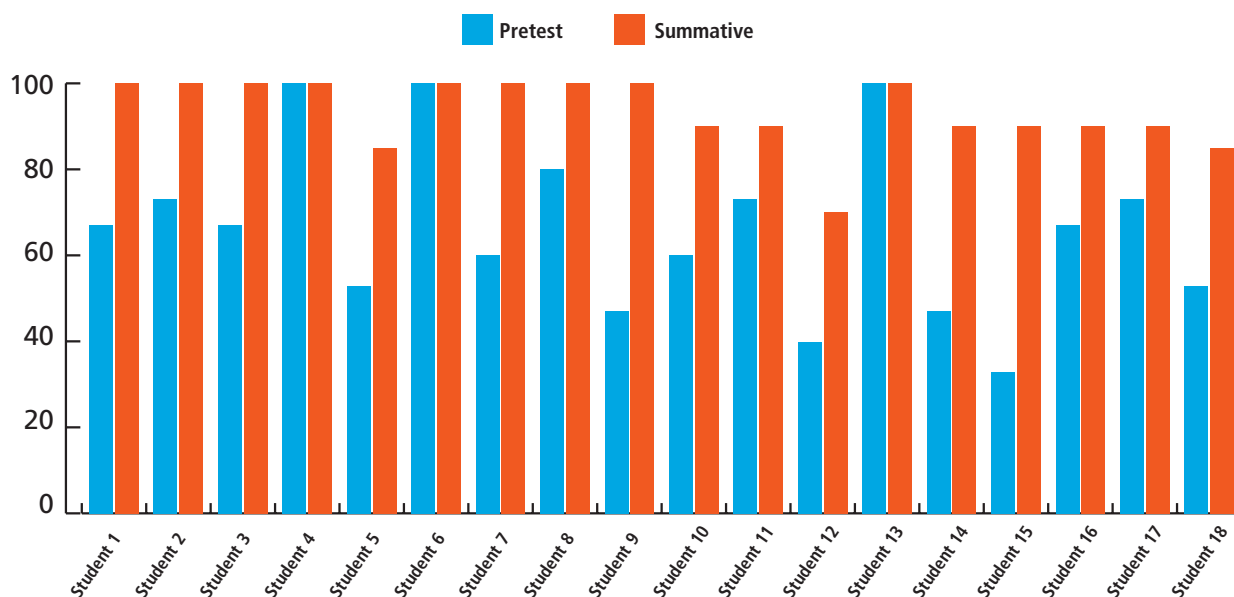
► RESULTS

Principal Egan feels she's become a better leader since using the Mathematics at Work framework and receiving guidance from Mona. According to her, Mona's clear vision had everyone on board, and teachers continue to express their appreciation for the collaboration methods and ideas she shared.

As a result of teacher teams creating strategies for students to understand assessments and grading,

students felt more confident tackling challenging problems, knowing their greater worth in the assessment. 25% of students increased their CFA scores, and 75% of students improved after initial testing on modules. The graph below offers a snapshot of the progress that is being realized throughout the school.

Math 7 Student Test Scores

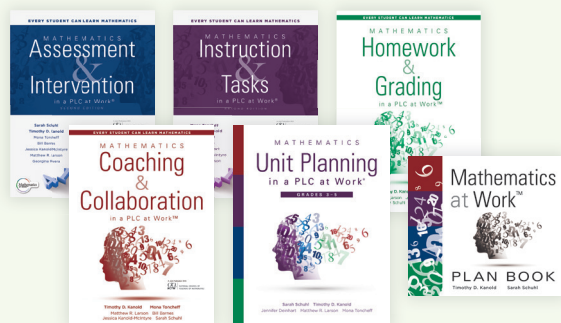


MATHEMATICS AT WORK™ SERVICES

To help you determine which services may be right for you, each of our professional learning engagements is designed to fit your goals, budget, and time commitment.

BUILDING Your Skills	DEEPENING Your Skills	SUSTAINING Your Skills
<p>One day with an expert in your school or district. Your team will gain understanding, inspiration, and strategies to start a professional learning program.</p>	<p>More intensive 2- to 4-day sessions with an expert to guide your entire staff or a smaller team to deepen understanding and further progress.</p>	<p>Work with one or several experts across multiple days to embed key processes, practices, and procedures designed to significantly improve staff performance and student achievement.</p>
<p>Keynote</p> <hr/> <p>Effective Mathematics Assessment and Intervention in a PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Effective Mathematics Instruction and Tasks in a PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Effective Mathematics Homework and Grading in a PLC at Work®</p> <hr/> <p>Effective Mathematics Coaching and Collaboration in a PLC at Work®</p> <p>1-DAY COMMITMENT</p>	<p>Mathematics PLC District-Embedded Content and Processes</p> <hr/> <p>Mathematics PLC Unit Planning and Curriculum Mapping</p> <p>2 TO 4-DAY COMMITMENT</p>	<p>Mathematics PLC School Site-Embedded Content and Processes</p> <hr/> <p>Customized Services</p> <hr/> <p>Global PD Teams</p> <p>MULTI-DAY COMMITMENT</p>

All training is delivered by a Mathematics at Work™ author or certified associate.



Sustained equity and improvement in mathematics requires:

1. A focus on student agency and confidence in doing mathematics
2. Teachers to focus on research-affirmed instructional design criteria in mathematics
3. Teachers to possess mathematics assessment literacy, including intervention and grading routines coherent from teacher to teacher and homework routines that effectively engage students in necessary practice

The Every Student Can Learn Mathematics series provides the teacher team actions necessary to achieve these ambitious expectations.

—Timothy D. Kanold, author



Juli K. Dixon, Edward C. Nolan, and Thomasenia Lott Adams,
authors, educators, and co-creators of DNA Mathematics

Develop a deep understanding of mathematics and teach it effectively

By Juli K. Dixon, Edward C. Nolan, and Thomasenia Lott Adams

While DNA Mathematics was named based on its founders, Juli K. **D**ixon, Edward C. **N**olan, and Thomasenia Lott **A**dams, the name is also appropriate as we target the “DNA” of mathematics instruction. We support teachers to develop the specialized level of content knowledge they need to be effective by positioning them as “doers” of mathematics. We then take them behind the scenes of their experience to make sense of how what they learned is important to teaching mathematics. The use of classroom video creates a shared image of effective mathematics instruction in classrooms and adds to the magic of DNA Mathematics.

The complete DNA Mathematics experience starts with a mutual agreement between administrators, coaches, and teachers on best practices for teaching mathematics through the exploration of big picture shifts in instruction. Following this, teachers (and often para-educators) are immersed in enhancing their content knowledge for teaching mathematics through grade band and course-focused content workshops. Interspersed with

content-focused workshops are opportunities for teachers to make sense of the TQE Process. The TQE Process encourages the use of **tasks** that lead to students’ conceptual knowledge and procedural skill, productive **questions** that elicit students’ thinking and common errors, and **evidence** to guide the formative assessment process.

When supporting schools and districts with this process, we are most impressed and excited by the immediate changes teachers make to their instruction and the impact this has on discourse and engagement in the classroom. Teachers and administrators often report that off-task behaviors are minimized and instructional time is maximized. This change results in increased student achievement on high-stakes assessments. Most importantly, teachers see the joy in doing mathematics with understanding and pass that joy along to their students.



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Hacienda La Puente Unified School District

LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **18,860** students
- › **72%** free and reduced lunch
- › **19%** English learners
- › **10%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **79.6%** Hispanic
- › **13.1%** Asian
- › **3.3%** White
- › **1%** Black
- › **0.5%** Multiracial
- › **0.3%** Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **2.1%** Other

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD) is located in Los Angeles County. HLPUSD is one of the largest districts in the San Gabriel Valley and serves students in Hacienda Heights, La Puente, and City of Industry.



A teacher takes time to ensure students understand the content.

► CHALLENGE

Mathematics had been a challenge at Hacienda La Puente Unified School District. Fewer than 30% of students were proficient in mathematics, and only 12% of 11th-grade students demonstrated college readiness on the Early Assessment Program (EAP). District leadership decided to provide teachers with ongoing, intensive professional development to increase rigor and student achievement in mathematics.

► IMPLEMENTATION

District leaders made the decision to bring Dr. Juli K. Dixon to HLPUSD to lead a one-day training for principals and teachers. Afterward, teachers were asked if they would be interested in summer professional development—the answer was an overwhelming yes.

HLPUSD began partnering with Solution Tree's DNA Mathematics experts to drive excellence in mathematics instruction. Leadership scheduled a variety of training opportunities over several years to ensure teachers at all grade levels increased their content knowledge and



The strength of DNA Mathematics is the real-life examples they bring to the table. What teachers like the most is that they learn the strategies in action. The teachers and administrators who attend the three-day sessions come away with increased content knowledge, depth of understanding, and practical classroom application.”

—Judy A. Fancher, assistant superintendent, Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, California

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

depth of understanding. Mathematics became a constant part of the district’s academic conversation and focus, with staff developing a sincere commitment to the mindset that all students have the ability to achieve in mathematics.

“The strength of the professional development is the real-life examples they bring to the table,” explained assistant superintendent Judy Fancher.

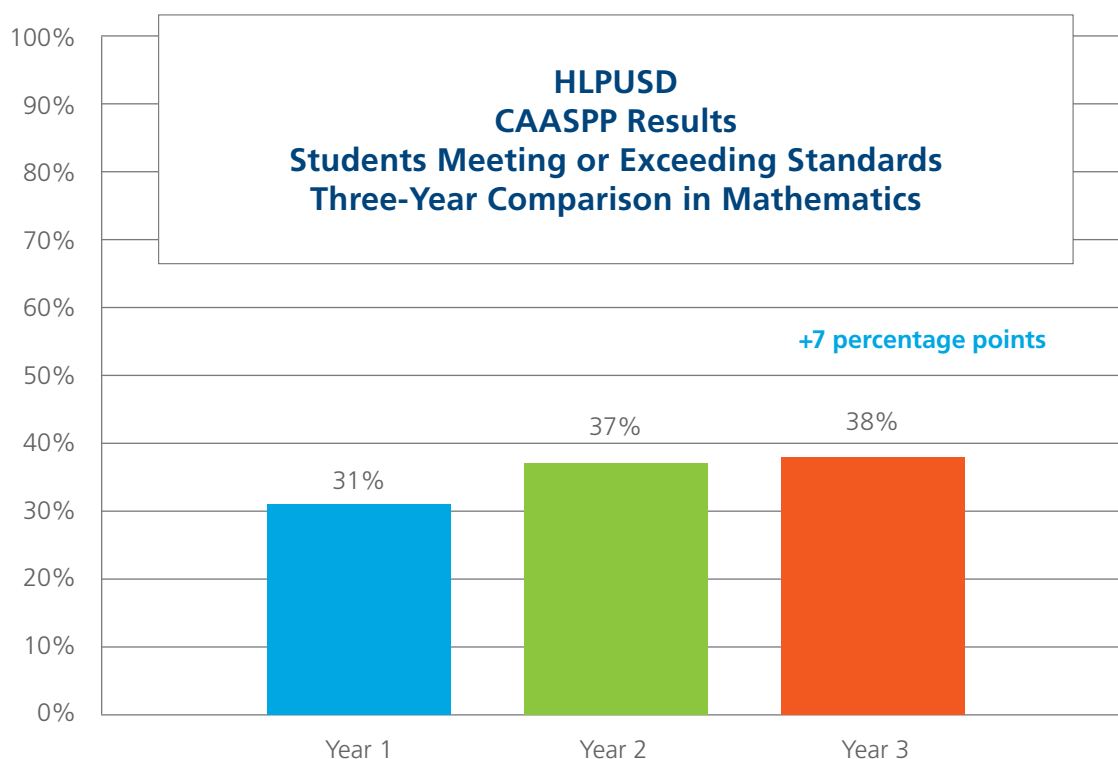
“What teachers like the most is that they learn the strategies in action. The workshops are interactive with the use of manipulatives, participant-created charts, and technology.”

► RESULTS

HLPUSD’s long-term goal is for all students to complete four years of high school college-preparatory mathematics. Since partnering with Solution Tree, the district has seen consistent growth from year to year and continues to build capacity at the site and district levels.

“We face the moral imperative to provide all students an opportunity to learn and apply mathematics,” said Dr. Fancher.

“As the global economy evolves, students, more than ever, require sophisticated math skills to increase opportunities for postsecondary education and careers.”



Saint Paul Public Schools

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA



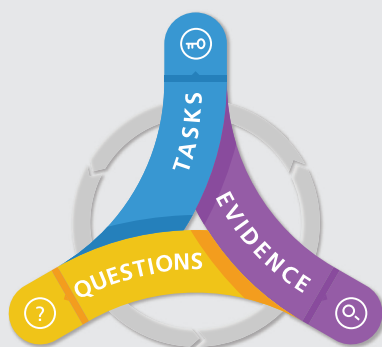
DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **37,010** students
- › **16%** special education
- › **29%** English learners

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **14%** Hispanic
- › **26%** Black
- › **21%** White
- › **7%** Multiracial
- › **31%** Asian
- › **<1%** Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- › **1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Saint Paul Public Schools is located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, a city of approximately 308,000 residents.



The TQE (tasks, questions, evidence) Process

► CHALLENGE

When Ishmael Robinson started his role as Saint Paul Public Schools' K–12 math supervisor, he was tasked with arranging professional development for mathematics teachers in his district.

Of Saint Paul's roughly 37,000 students, close to 30% were English learners, and another 16% required special education. Saint Paul Public Schools would need a comprehensive PD solution that empowered its staff to address the mathematics needs of diverse learners.

"The mathematics culture was very procedural and disjointed," Robinson said. "We went in a lot of different directions, and we had visions of doing the things we wanted to do, but as a system, we weren't sure how we could get there."

Ishmael chose DNA Mathematics, which focuses on enhancing the knowledge, skills, and effectiveness of mathematics teachers so students can receive the best education possible.

"I felt it was important for our teachers to understand and know the instructional moves that went with the practice," Robinson said. "You can tell them about the practice all you want, but if they don't know when to do what, they're less likely to try the practice."

► IMPLEMENTATION

Saint Paul Public Schools worked closely with Solution Tree expert Juli K. Dixon, a co-founder of DNA Mathematics. The staff collaborated with Juli to build a solid foundation of content knowledge for teaching mathematics, then extend that knowledge to students through the implementation of the TQE Process.

This structured solution—which combines tasks, questions, and evidence to drive efficacy in student learning—empowered Saint Paul's mathematics educators to identify learning goals, facilitate productive questions, and employ



TQE was a radical difference that convinced me this is the right way to be teaching our children, especially the ones who are most marginalized in our learning communities.”

—Stacy Waskosky, second-grade mathematics teacher, Capitol Hill Gifted and Talented Magnet School, Minnesota

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

evidence-based formative assessment to deliver optimum instruction.

“You have to try it,” says Thanh Tran, elementary district math specialist. “Go slow, but once you get people who have experienced DNA Mathematics and the progression of how things are done, you will get believers out of the teachers and out of the students who believe they can now learn mathematics.”

The DNA Mathematics model and TQE Process fostered dynamic conversations about learning

among all students—strengthening both literacy and mathematics skills at the same time.

“It was wonderful to see that much dialogue; children speaking, explaining, talking—and pulling out more and more math language,” said Peggy Nayar, a pre-algebra teacher at Farnsworth Aerospace preK–8. “Teachers were seeing how much students are capable of talking. I’m a big believer that they need to be talking about mathematics.”

► RESULTS

In the three years since beginning its DNA Mathematics journey, Saint Paul Public Schools has succeeded in creating a mathematics culture that advances the learning of every student. What once was a procedural and disjointed mathematics department has since transformed into a responsive, engaging team that anticipates every student being able to learn at high levels.

“We look at the data and we see huge increases in growth,” said Patricia Busta, an elementary mathematics coach for the district. “The fun part is, by

Year 2, we had so many teachers calling, emailing, and texting with pride in their change in data.”

It was a leap of faith, but one that Saint Paul’s mathematics teachers decisively say has changed their classrooms for the better.

“You’re welcome in this environment,” Nayar said. “The text and the information and the presentations and the approaches will blend nicely with techniques and strategies you already use. When you marry all that together, I believe it’s an asset for all the learners in the room.”



Saint Paul Public Schools educators work collaboratively during a professional development session.

DNA MATHEMATICS SERVICES

To help you determine which services may be right for you, each of our professional learning engagements is designed to fit your goals, budget, and time commitment.

BUILDING Your Skills	DEEPENING Your Skills	SUSTAINING Your Skills
<p>One day with an expert in your school or district. Your team will gain understanding, inspiration, and strategies to start a professional learning program.</p>	<p>More intensive 2- to 4-day sessions with an expert to guide your entire staff or a smaller team to deepen understanding and further progress.</p>	<p>Work with one or several experts across multiple days to embed key processes, practices, and procedures designed to significantly improve staff performance and student achievement.</p>
<p>Keynote</p> <hr/> <p>Big-Picture Shifts in Content and Instruction</p> <hr/> <p>Meeting the Needs of Each and Every Student</p>	<p>Content Institutes</p> <hr/> <p>Multiplication Fact Fluency: A Schoolwide Solution</p> <hr/> <p>Content Workshops</p> <hr/> <p>Instructional Quality Workshops</p> <hr/> <p>TQE Learning Lab and Lesson Study</p> <hr/> <p>School Walkthroughs</p>	<p>On-Site Support</p> <hr/> <p>Customized Services</p> <hr/> <p>Global PD Teams</p>
<p>1-DAY COMMITMENT</p>	<p>2 TO 4-DAY COMMITMENT</p>	<p>MULTI-DAY COMMITMENT</p>

All training is delivered by a DNA Mathematics author or certified associate.



Making Sense of Mathematics for Teaching series

This user-friendly series presents an authentic look inside real mathematics classrooms and invites teachers to become learners of mathematics.

- Learn to apply the TQE Process (tasks, questions, and evidence) to improve the teaching of mathematics.
- Explore how to develop, select, and modify mathematics tasks in order to engage students and balance cognitive demand.



Making Sense of Mathematics for Teaching Facilitator's Guide and DVD series

These facilitator's guides equip workshop leaders to build on the Making Sense of Mathematics for Teaching series through the TQE Process.



Philip B. Warrick, EdD, Author and Associate, Marzano Resources

A systemic approach to highly effective teaching and learning

By Philip B. Warrick, EdD

Professional learning content developed by the Marzano Resources team of authors and associates is research-informed and provides educators with multiple opportunities to engage in individual development as well as district and schoolwide development. Content developed by Marzano Resources authors is done with a purposeful alignment to the five levels of the Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework. The five levels of the HRS framework guide educators to the right work in order to develop a systemic approach to highly effective teaching and learning.

High Reliability Schools Levels

The purposeful alignment of Marzano Resources content to the HRS framework empowers districts and schools to engage in both short-term and

long-term professional development planning. This provides educators with content to meet their current needs while establishing clear connections to future professional learning. The five HRS levels allow districts and schools to see a clear picture of what their journey could focus on during a multi-year period of professional development. Each HRS level is constructed to support and mesh with the prior and subsequent levels, thus ensuring tight alignment of professional learning over time.

The Marzano Resources team of authors and associates stand ready to partner with your schools to bring our research-informed content learning to you.



LEARN MORE NOW
SolutionTree.com/Evidence

High Reliability Schools

What if schools refused to allow even one student to fail?

High reliability organizations are fully committed to proactively preventing failures and ensuring success.

Discover how your school can adopt this same high reliability mindset and drive profound improvements in student achievement with the Marzano High Reliability Schools framework.



Take the next step on your school improvement journey

Trusted by administrators around the world, the **Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS)** framework has helped hundreds of schools and districts dramatically improve. Now, in the rapidly changing educational landscape, educators rely on this trusted framework to help them keep a laser-like focus on the five key areas of performance that matter most:

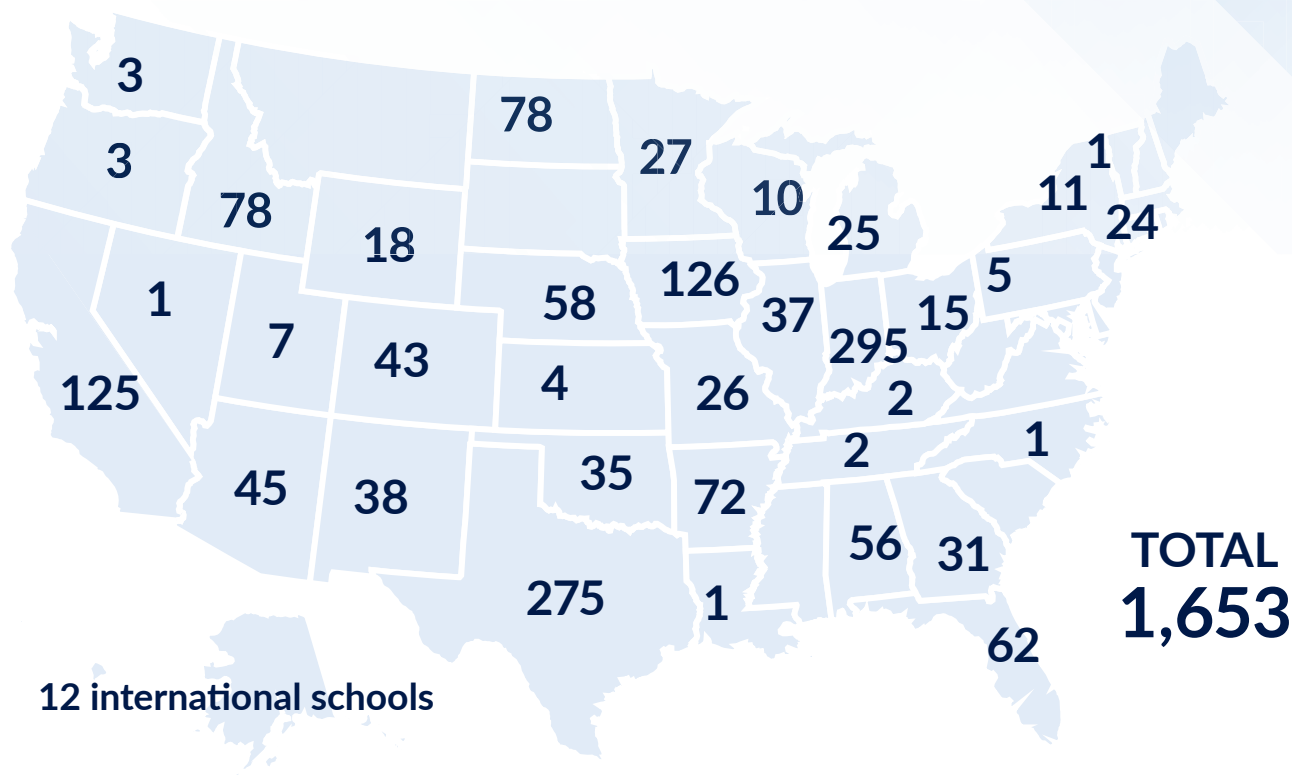


Celebrate your success

For schools and districts that have attained one or more levels of reliability, **Marzano Resources** offers **formal certification** to share with your community and stakeholders.

High Reliability Schools by the numbers

Each certified High Reliability School employs educators who have made a collaborative commitment to the success of every student. Their daily practice involves implementing research-based strategies at one or more of the HRS levels to make a permanent, positive, and significant impact on student achievement.



In addition to the **1,653 HRS certified schools** across the world, there are also **84 school districts** that are HRS certified in the United States.

2023 Snapshot

In total, **313 schools** received HRS certification in 2023 (see a breakdown by level below). This includes three schools at Level 5 certification: Metropolitan Arts Academy, Colorado STEM Academy, and Sunset Ridge Elementary School. Marzano Resources approved **five districtwide certifications** in 2023.



BECOME A HIGH RELIABILITY SCHOOL

MarzanoResources.com/Reliability

The School District of Lee County

FORT MYERS, FLORIDA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **99,354** students
- › **74.5%** free and reduced lunch
- › **17.5%** English learners
- › **11.5%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **46.9%** Hispanic
- › **34.5%** White
- › **13.6%** Black
- › **3.2%** Multiracial
- › **1.6%** Asian
- › **0.1%** American Indian or Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

The School District of Lee County is the ninth largest in Florida and the 32nd largest in the nation. Lee County educates over 100,000 students with just over 13,000 employees. The School District of Lee County strives to be a world-class school system where each student reaches his or her highest personal potential. Safe and supportive learning environments are critical to their mission.



► CHALLENGE

As a district, Lee County hires approximately 500–700 new teachers yearly. Many teachers they've hired came to the profession as career changers and required ongoing support to increase their instructional capacity.

The administration team at Lee also saw several teachers, leaders, and community members expressing the desire to provide input and input at the optimal functioning of their school and district.

The resulting need to hire and train new teachers and the request for input at several schools led the School District of Lee County to adopt the Marzano High Reliability Schools framework. The administration team hoped to use the framework for school improvement, creating and monitoring common systems across all school buildings for teachers, leaders, parents, and students.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Once the decision had been made to adopt the HRS framework, school leaders engaged in training during fall of the following school year.

The training initially started as optional sessions for school leaders and peer collaborative teachers. Sessions took place through in-person and Zoom training during the pandemic years. Training was offered throughout the school year and as a component of summer training for leaders.

As engagement and excitement for the learning continued, several schools expressed interest in obtaining Level 1 HRS Certification, which focuses on a safe, supportive, and collaborative culture. Through the award of the ESSER grant, Lee County was able to fulfill these requests. Cohort 1 was created at the High Reliability Schools Coaching Academy, which is specially designed professional development that prepares teams of educators to lead their school in mastering all five levels of the Marzano HRS framework, with an emphasis on the first three levels: Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture; Effective Teaching in Every Classroom; and Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. A cohort consisted of the principal, teacher leaders, and a district representative.

The academy consisted of six training days, surveys for students, parents, faculty, and staff, HRS Toolkits, and coaching from a Marzano associate.



Through the ESSER grant, Lee has created a sustainable pathway for leaders and principal-recognized teacher leaders who have not only received training in the Marzano High Reliability Schools levels and indicators, but they also now have the resources needed to pursue the work on their own.”

—Helen Davis Martin, Ed.D., director of professional development, The School District of Lee County, Florida

All 10 schools in Cohort 1 achieved Level 1 certification. This momentum sparked interest in other schools, and three additional cohorts were offered. A pathway was then created to allow all schools to engage in the HRS Academy and obtain Level 1 certification.

Schools in Lee County that wanted to earn an HRS certification had to survey parents, students, faculty, and staff regarding the eight leading indicators for Level 1, create an action plan to address areas indicating an opportunity, and monitor data from the systems implemented on an ongoing basis to obtain certification.

► RESULTS

32 schools in the Lee County School District received a Level 1 HRS certification. 26 early adopter schools opted to engage in a Level 2 Academy.

Students across grades 3–10 at Lee County schools with Level 1 certification have experienced higher proficiency scores in English language arts.

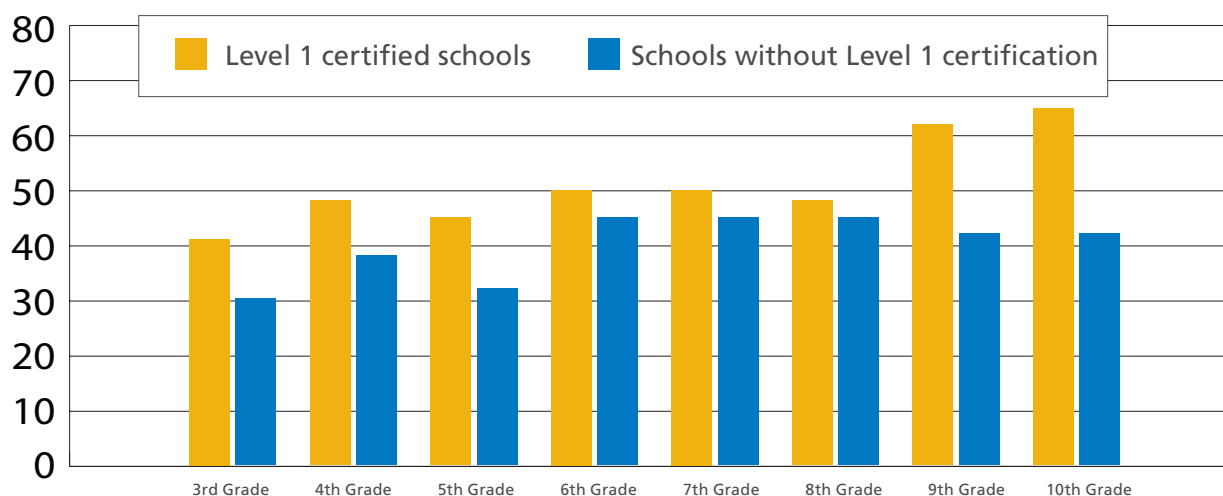
The implementation of leadership indicators has fostered a unified approach to learning and collaboration among teachers, creating a stronger foundation for both student and staff growth.

While teacher leaders engaged in professional learning with their administrators during the HRS Academy, they expressed interest in learning more about the New Art and Science of Teaching.

Teachers in Lee County supported the New Art and Science of Teaching, and attendance at professional development training grew to more than 200 teachers for each evening session. More than 700 teachers received training in the New Art and Science of Teaching. Now, 75 teachers are applying their learning through the High Reliability Teacher process, and out of those, four teachers have recently achieved High Reliability Teacher Level 1 certification.

As far as return on investment, staff surveys indicate educators in Lee County value their work with HRS. In year 1 of implementation, **93% agreed and strongly agreed that the content presented will enhance work performance.** In year 5 of implementation, **94% of staff surveyed agreed and strongly agreed that HRS professional learning provides them with a meaningful opportunity to learn and grow.**

ELA Student Achievement Data, Grades 3–10



Average percent proficiency on FAST ELA scores in HRS Level 1 certified schools compared to schools not yet certified

Charlotte High School

CHARLOTTE, MICHIGAN



DEMOGRAPHICS

› **815** students

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **92.1%** White
- › **4.2%** Hispanic
- › **1.7%** Black
- › **1%** Asian
- › **0.7%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.7%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- › **0.5%** Multiracial

Charlotte High School is located in Charlotte, Michigan, a community of approximately 9,000 residents.



► CHALLENGE

With 218 detentions and 126 Saturday school referrals in one semester, Charlotte High School sought an answer to reduce the amount of exclusionary discipline referrals. Many of its students facing these consistent disciplinary challenges felt disconnected from the school, feeling as though they had no positive relationships with anyone on campus. While teachers and administrators wanted to reduce these disciplinary numbers and poor relationships, they also felt a responsibility to hold students accountable for their actions and wanted to maintain suspension and other forms of traditional discipline when necessary. Seeking High Reliability Schools Level 1 and 2 certifications would ultimately address all facets of this challenge.

► IMPLEMENTATION

As part of its High Reliability Schools Level 1 certification process, Charlotte implemented a professional development plan called "Big Ideas," where the staff identified six different areas of need. Teachers worked in cross-content PLCs to help achieve goals and solve problems for each topic. Through this, a key group focused on a restorative justice model, then underwent training and developed a plan to implement the practices schoolwide. Three members of the restorative justice group, as well as Principal Bill Barnes and Assistant Principal Sharee Burdick, received certification on running restorative circles. The schedules of two teachers were also arranged so they could work with administrators to create opportunities for students to right their wrongs, even in instances where traditional discipline was used.

The Restorative Justice Team has created an alternate route for teachers to receive support for behavioral issues in the classroom without resorting to a formal behavioral referral. The Restorative Justice facilitators themselves work to resolve behavioral issues inside the classroom and out, including teacher-student conflict resolution, chronic behavioral issues in class, and peer-to-peer conflict resolution. The facilitators check in with these students on a regular basis, including students who have faced consistent behavioral struggles for years, to help open a dialogue between the student and teacher.



By building relationships through the Restorative Justice program, these students are no longer ‘falling through the cracks’ at such a large rate.”

—Sharee Burdick, assistant principal, Charlotte High School, Michigan

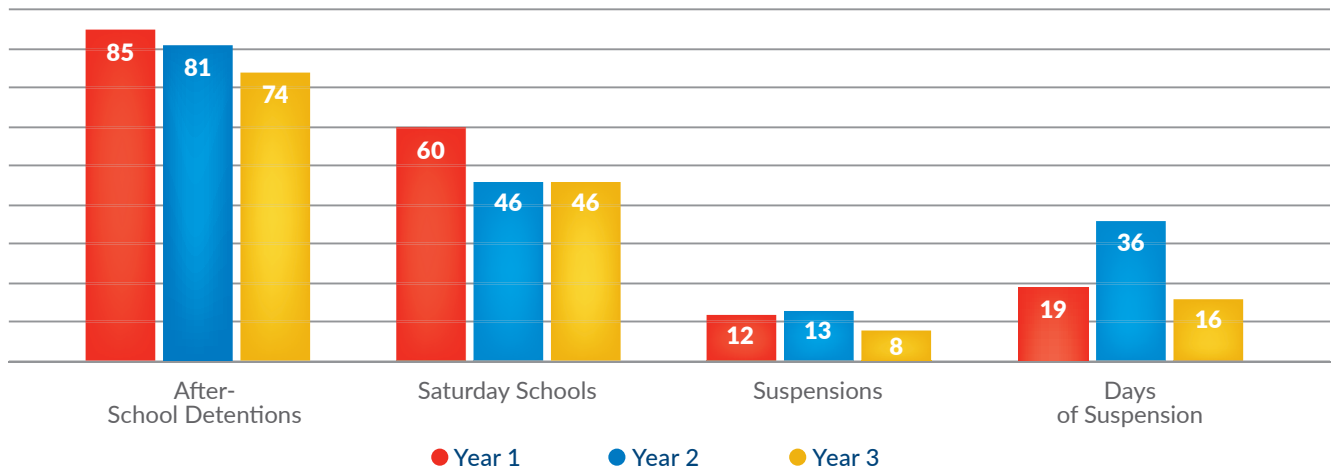
► RESULTS

Charlotte’s teachers and administrators say their efforts with restorative justice programs are working, particularly with lower-level offenses and key demographics. By the next school year, the number of detentions was cut nearly in half. The number of Saturday school referrals was reduced as well. The number of students receiving a free or reduced lunch who received suspensions was also significantly reduced, as well as the number of female students serving suspensions. While the overall number of suspensions remained the same, the number of one-day or half-day suspensions decreased. These shorter suspensions, typically used for low-level offenses, were often replaced with restorative practices.

Reentry circles have also shortened what used to be a four- or five-day suspension. Suspensions at Charlotte are now primarily being used for higher-level offenses. Some of the students facing more severe punishment, which had previously ended in expulsion, are now suspended long term (20 or more days) instead. With Charlotte’s restorative justice program, two students who underwent long-term suspension successfully returned to class with a plan by the end of the semester, drastically increasing their ability to obtain a quality education.

CHARLOTTE HIGH SCHOOL

Student behavior data during the first term of the school year



Oak Ridge High School

CONROE, TEXAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **4,133** students
- › **24%** free and reduced lunch
- › **3.2%** English learners
- › **6%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **52.8%** White
- › **29.3%** Hispanic
- › **11.1%** Black
- › **3%** Asian
- › **1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Oak Ridge High School is part of the Conroe Independent School District located in Conroe, Texas, a community of approximately 82,000 residents.



► CHALLENGE

Oak Ridge principal Tommy Johnson sought a system that ensured effective procedures were in place to implement quality teaching in every classroom. After attending an instructional rounds professional development session with Marzano Resources consultant Phil Warrick, Johnson determined that the High Reliability Schools (HRS) process was the answer to addressing Oak Ridge's core principle: that all students can learn. Teachers would need to learn the process efficiently, as the school could not shut down or cancel classes to implement the framework.

► IMPLEMENTATION

After Johnson attended the High Reliability Schools Summit in Austin, Texas, his staff adopted the New Art and Science of Teaching instructional model, utilizing the PLC process as a conduit to continuous school improvement.

Upon adopting the HRS framework, Oak Ridge's staff of more than 300 professionals was trained on the HRS instructional model to utilize clarity, forethought, and consistent application to ensure successful implementation.

After creating a vision that was comprehensible and meaningful, clear communication protocols were established for the school's stakeholders, connecting the instructional model to the framework of Oak Ridge's operations. Teachers were assured that the HRS process was neither

► **IMPLEMENTATION** CONTINUED

reactionary nor punitive, but instead a method that Oak Ridge would use to run its organization. An interdisciplinary board of directors was created to help school leadership effectively establish organizational procedures and help its teachers successfully make the shift to HRS instruction.

► **RESULTS**

Since obtaining Level 1 HRS Certification, Oak Ridge has succeeded in both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks: Academic progress has manifested with increased SAT scores, better attendance rates, lower teacher turnover rates, and fewer discipline referrals. Johnson also says that focusing on instruction and teacher

“What we were lacking was a system that tied everything about providing a quality education together,” Johnson said. “HRS allows us to effectively implement, monitor, improve, and reflect on instruction for all students.”

effectiveness has improved the overall school culture and climate.

“We are purposeful, reflective, and intentional about the educational decisions we make, day in and day out, within the framework of our instructional model and the HRS system,” Johnson said.

“

The anecdotal evidence we have gathered indicates that teachers are spending more time talking about effective instruction, and that we are building a school culture where collaboration, reflection, and self-care are part of who we are, not just something we do.”

—Tommy Johnson, principal, Oak Ridge High School, Texas

Tomé Elementary School

LOS LUNAS, NEW MEXICO

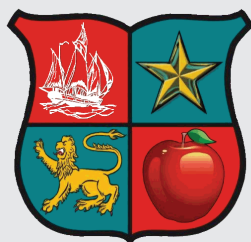


DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **465** students
- › **100%** free and reduced lunch
- › **28%** English learners
- › **17%** special education

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **80%** Hispanic
- › **15.2%** White
- › **2.24%** Black
- › **2%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **.49%** Asian



► CHALLENGE

Tomé Elementary School began building a professional learning community (PLC) years ago. However, after several years of implementation, it became evident that the school was not fully operating as a PLC. In response, school leadership decided to recommit to the three big ideas of the PLC at Work® process: a collective responsibility and collaborative culture, a focus on student learning, and a results orientation. To drive learning even further, the school also began using Robert J. Marzano's High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Staff committed themselves to analyzing practices and determining if they were making decisions because they were good for students or convenient for adults. To guarantee student learning, ineffective practices were abandoned, no matter how ingrained the tradition.

Expectations for grade-level collaborative teams were also redefined, which included a minimum of two collaborative meetings per week. Grade-level teams were given the autonomy to create their own instructional schedule within a defined framework, and dedicated intervention blocks were added to the school's master schedule.

Each grade level developed professional practices and norms, as well as interventions based on common formative assessment data. Administrators and academic coaches regularly provided feedback to grade-level teams. As the school began pursuing HRS certification, school leadership implemented a formal feedback process, encouraging students, parents, and community members to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school.

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

As Tomé continued to make improvements and learn about both HRS and PLC, staff realized just how intertwined the two processes are. “These models have allowed us to evaluate policies, practices, and procedures to be able to be where we are today,” said Principal Casey R. Ahner. “We have made

the guarantee to parents that regardless of the classroom their student is in, their child will receive all the extra time, help, and support they require to be successful. All staff members participate in an ‘all hands on deck’ approach including myself.”

► RESULTS

Tomé is now a certified Level 3 High Reliability School as well as a recognized Model PLC at Work school on AllThingsPLC.info, a website dedicated to the PLC at Work process. The school has seen growth in the areas of academic achievement, teacher practice, and student behavior.

Teachers track student achievement on formative and common formative assessments, and results show that students are consistently meeting or exceeding grade-

level goals of 80% proficiency on essential standards. Proficiency rates on interim and benchmark assessments continue to climb. Teacher practice also continues to grow as they participate in job-embedded professional learning, including instructional rounds with peers and use of video. The number of student discipline referrals has continued to decrease, and the school has not had any long-term suspensions in more than three years.



I would recommend for anyone who puts student learning first to use the PLC at Work process and HRS framework. I also encourage them to learn the basic tenets of the models, attend an event, and seek support from someone who has taken the journey. Their experience and learning will be invaluable.”

—Casey R. Ahner, principal, Tomé Elementary School, New Mexico

Berkman Arts Integration Academy

ROUND ROCK, TEXAS



DEMOGRAPHICS

- › **505** students
- › **6.7%** special education
- › **45.6%** English language learners

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- › **71.2%** Hispanic
- › **13.2%** Black
- › **11.3%** White
- › **2.3%** Multiracial
- › **1.5%** Asian
- › **0.2%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- › **0.2%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Berkman Arts Integration Academy is located in Round Rock, Texas, a community of approximately 124,000 residents.



► CHALLENGE

As the highest economically disadvantaged school in Round Rock ISD, Berkman Arts Integration Academy had a culture of low expectations for its students. The school suffered from high principal turnover and did not meet the standards for Index 1 of the state's school accountability rating system. Principal Kathy Cawthron decided to lead staff through a root cause analysis and determined the High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework was the answer to achieving their school improvement goals.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Berkman began pursuing HRS certification at **Level 1 (Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture)**. Staff, parents, and students completed the HRS Level I survey in order to identify areas of strength and need. Based on survey results, the leadership team took action to improve school culture. The administrative team began training staff on professional learning communities (PLCs), and instructional coaches worked closely with teams to ensure successful implementation.

At **Level 2 (Effective Teaching in Every Classroom)** of the certification process, leadership created a video library for teachers to view effective instructional practices. Teachers began to build confidence in their teaching, thanks to the development of a clear vision, administrative and coaching support, and targeted professional development opportunities. "HRS has helped Berkman focus our efforts to prioritize and accentuate instruction, leading to deeper learning opportunities for our students," shared Cawthron.

At **Level 3 (Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum)** school leaders worked with HRS expert Philip B. Warrick to identify priority standards in mathematics and English language arts. From there, administrators

and coaches met with grade-level teams to align priority standards, and teachers were given the flexibility to adjust timelines based on the selected targets.

► RESULTS

Since beginning their HRS journey, Berkman has succeeded in building a safe, supportive, and collaborative culture; ensuring effective teaching in every classroom; and implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum. In addition, Berkman's STAAR scores have significantly increased, and

the school is at or above the state average for math, science, and reading. Cawthron explained, "While the increase in our STAAR scores is amazing, I believe our biggest success has been the increased efficacy of our teachers, leading to elevated learning and creative thinking of our students."



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—Kathy Cawthron, principal, Berkman Arts Integration Academy, Texas



Changemakers share their experience **with** **Marzano Resources PD**

“ Our associates helped us analyze where our school is at and take a hard look at where we need to be. Having the associates meet with grade-level teams and explain the process of analyzing student data, grouping, and assessing was extremely powerful for our team.”

—Angelica Duque, principal, Gadsden Independent School District, New Mexico

“ We are revolutionizing the way we teach and learn in N4 because of our partnership [with Marzano Resources].”

—Dr. Karime Asaf, chief of language and cultural education, Chicago Public Schools, Illinois

“ We have loved our HRS journey and the framework it has provided our school as we move towards building our ‘Wildcat Way.’ We received our state assessment scores this week and wanted to share that in the last two years, we went from having 33% of our students on grade level for literacy to now 73% of our students. Thank you for your guidance and the framework.”

—Michael Rodrigo, principal, Wayne Thomas Elementary School, Illinois

“ Shifting away from traditional education pitfalls to personalize learning through competency-based practices and strategies is the key to improving both teaching and learning for everyone in the learning community. The authors and leaders at Marzano Resources leverage their experience to deliver actionable steps to make this transformation a natural process.”

—Michael Hakkarinen

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- › Progress monitoring to keep you focused on priority goals for your schools
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Achieving **Academic Excellence** for *All*

Model PLC at Work® Schools and Districts Focus on Results

Congratulations to the schools across the nation and around the world that have been named Model PLCs at Work® by the selection committee from AllThingsPLC.info, the only website dedicated to the PLC at Work process.

These schools and districts have demonstrated evidence of a commitment to learning for all students through a collaborative culture with a focus on results.

Adel Desoto Minburn Middle School	Garden Hills Elementary School	Kildeer Countryside Elementary School	Ronald W. Reagan Elementary
Adlai Stevenson High School	Garrett Elementary	Kildeer Countryside School District 96	Sacred Heart Primary School
Alcott Elementary	Gladys Polk Elementary	Kinard Middle School	Sanger High School
Arlington High School	Glyndon-Felton Elementary	Kirksey Middle School	Sangster Elementary
Atlantis Elementary School	Granby School District	Klein Oak High School	Schaumburg Community
Bayside High School	Grant Line Elementary	Krahn Elementary	Consolidated School District
Benton Middle School	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts	Lafayette High School	Sheridan Junior High School
Block House Creek Elementary	Middle School	Lakeview Elementary	Singapore American School
Bloomington High School South	Hallsville High School	Lewis and Clark Elementary	(Elementary Division)
Blue Valley High School	Hallsville Independent School District	Lewis Carroll Elementary School	Singapore American School
Blue Valley School District	Hallsville Jr. High	Lincoln Elementary	(High School Division)
Bradford Special School District	Hallsville North Elementary	Longfellow Elementary	Singapore American School
Carlton Gardens Primary School	Hanover Highlands Elementary School	Longleaf Elementary School	(Middle School Division)
Cashmere Primary	Harrisfield Primary	Madison Middle School	Solon High School
Central Intermediate School	Hastings Middle School	Mason Crest Elementary	South Kamloops Secondary
Central Middle School	Hawthorne Elementary	Mater Christi Catholic Primary School	Southmoreland Elementary School
Centreville Elementary School	Health Sciences High & Middle College	Milan C-2 Elementary	Southmoreland High School
Cheshire Elementary School	Helen Keller Junior High School	Millville Elementary School	Southmoreland Middle School
Clinton Community School District	Helensvale High School	Minnieville Elementary	Southmoreland Primary Center
Clinton High School	Helper Middle School	Minot High School Central Campus	Southside Elementary School
Cobden Jr./Sr. High School	Henderson Elementary School	Montezuma Community Schools	Sparks High School
Coppell Middle School North	Heritage Middle School	Montezuma Elementary	St. Mary's Catholic School Toukley
Coronado Elementary	Hidden River Middle School	Montezuma High School	St. Andrews Elementary School
Country Meadows School	Highland Park Elementary School	Morton Elementary	Stults Road Elementary School
Denver Secondary School	Hortonville Area School District	Morton West High School	Taroona High School
Desert Hills High School	Ivy Hall Elementary School	Mount Tabor Elementary	Thermopolis Middle School
Desert View Elementary	J Sterling Morton HS District 201	Mountain Meadow Elementary School	Tomé, World's Best Elementary
DJ Bakie Elementary School	Jackson Creek Middle School	Natick Public Schools (District)	Twin Groves Middle School
Dwight D. Eisenhower Junior High School	Jakarta Intercultural School	New Prague Middle School	U. S. Grant High School
Eagle Glen Intermediate	(Middle School)	Northwestern Middle School	Ulrich Intermediate
École Élémentaire Catholique Arc-en-Ciel	Jakarta Intercultural School	Oak Park High School	Vallecitos School District
École Élémentaire Catholique	(Pattimura Elementary)	Pioneer Middle School	Viers Mill Elementary
Saint-Guillaume	James Bowie High School	Pleasantville Elementary	Virginia L. Murray Elementary School
Enders Salk School	Jefferson Elementary (California)	Pollard Meadows Elementary	Washington Academic Middle School
Esther Starkman Elementary	Jefferson Elementary School (Indiana)	Prairie Elementary School	Washington Elementary School
Evansville Central High School	Jersey Avenue Elementary School	Prairie Hill Elementary School	West Middle School (Iowa)
Fairdale High School	JoAnn Leleck Elementary School	Quest Elementary School	West Middle School (Michigan)
Fern Creek High School	at Broad Acres	R.L. Stevenson Elementary	White River High School
Field Elementary	John Marshall Mid-High Enterprise School	Ramirez Thomas Elementary School	Whittier Elementary
Fossil Ridge Intermediate School	John Muir Literacy Academy	Randolph Elementary	Willow Grove Early Learning Center
Fouke Elementary School	Jose S. Ramirez Elementary	Raymore Elementary School	Windsor Central Middle School
Francis Howell High School	Jupiter Elementary School	Riverside Brookfield High School	Woodland Park Elementary
Freedom 7 Elementary School	Kenneth Cooper Middle School	Rocklin Academy Elementary	Woodlawn Middle School
Gamble Rogers Middle School	Kent Prairie Elementary School	Rocklin Academy Gateway Elementary	Zwink Elementary

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“

One child,
one teacher, one
pen, one book
can change
the world.”

—Malala Yousafzai

“

Teachers affect
eternity; They can
never tell where
their influence
stops.”

—Henry Brooks Adams

“

Summer vacation
is the time when
parents realize
teachers are
grossly underpaid.”

—Barbara Kingsolver

“

I am only one, but I am one.
I cannot do everything, but I
can do something. And what
I can do, I ought to do. And
by the grace of God, I will.”

—Helen Keller



Does Arkansas – the Land of Opportunity – Have the Solution to America's Public Education Crisis?

While many schools and districts in America remain caught in a quagmire of dismal student achievement data, **Arkansas's schools working with Solution Tree are experiencing an education revolution. The difference?** Arkansas educators not only see the hope and possibility in every child, they have strategies and action plans in place to ensure each student reaches their full potential. Education thought leader Robert Eaker and former Arkansas Secretary of Education Johnny Key share their story.

The global COVID-19 pandemic was a unique stress test for the American education system. For nearly three years, it disrupted the cadence of traditional learning and has had extensive downstream effects on public schools. Among the issues that have been thoroughly reported and attested in the literature are rampant absenteeism, slipping student performance and poor teacher retention. The resulting loss of confidence in the status quo has precipitated an unprecedented uptick in homeschooling and left the public asking, "How do we fix public education in America?" A revolutionary approach, proven in the Arkansas public school system over the past five years, could hold the solution.

Improving Outcomes

In 2017, Arkansas State Legislature and the Arkansas Department of Education, in partnership with Solution Tree, began implementing the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process. PLC at Work adopts best practices from private sector management consulting and relies on extensive educational, organizational development and leadership research to transform public education across the state; it has proven very effective.

Since its inception, the limited, application-only project has serviced nearly 100 schools that have demonstrated both their need for and commitment to following the process. Records show that participating schools experienced **31% less COVID-related learning loss** (as measured by loss in letter grade points) compared to non-project schools. PLC at Work has also drastically improved student outcomes, reduced teacher turnover and resolved behavioral issues. Let's examine two Arkansas schools that best illustrate the program's impacts and success.

Case in Point

Bragg Elementary School in West Memphis and the Main Street Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School in Hot Springs are two schools that typify Arkansas' success with the PLC at Work process.

At Bragg Elementary, 100% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 10% are enrolled in special education programs. Despite numerous challenges, fifth and sixth graders saw tremendous improvement in their standardized test scores. The ACT Aspire assessment, which measures student progress toward reaching educational objectives and gauges their chances of remaining on target, found that fifth and sixth graders scoring in the "ready" and "exceeding"

categories increased from 27% to 77% in math. During that same two-year period, the total percentage of students scoring in the "ready" and "exceeding" categories for reading increased from 12% to 46%.

Like at Bragg Elementary, all students attending the Main Street Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. For years, the school suffered from high teacher turnover, underperformed academically, and saw as many as 29% of newly enrolling kindergarteners identified as needing special education interventions. After just three years with the PLC at Work process, the school saw a 79% reduction in teacher turnover and a 56% reduction in behavioral referrals.

A Tactical Approach

Inspired by postwar-era Japanese manufacturers, Professional Learning Communities at Work, or PLCs, emphasize the importance of collaborative teaming and local-level decision-making. Manufacturing leaders of that time understood that frontline workers — much like the modern-day teacher — possessed firsthand knowledge of the problems they faced and could devise exceptionally effective solutions if given the proper tools and support. Their leaders also learned to be rigid in defining their objectives but flexible in how workers achieved goals. With PLC at Work, guaranteeing academic success across every school district remains a critical goal, but now, so is supporting teachers differently and more effectively.

Leveraging extensive research of the most effective educational, organizational and leadership practices, the PLC at Work process equips and empowers teachers by providing a model wherein they can collaborate with administrators and school district officials to rethink the determiners of student success, set appropriate learning objectives and standards, and consider funding requirements. As a result, school districts more frequently administer common assessments to verify student understanding throughout the learning process and not only upon the conclusion of a learning unit. This innovation offers insight into student learning patterns and cognitive development processes.

Additionally, teachers can better address student behavioral issues and plan special education interventions by sharing and adopting best practices and forming robust peer support communities. Ultimately, educators are being empowered to place student needs at the center of their approach, and school districts across Arkansas better meet student needs through

greater collaboration and increased knowledge and capabilities sharing.

Lessons for Other States

Perhaps the most important finding here is that despite decades of failed attempts at the state and federal levels, it is both plausible and possible to implement a successful statewide school improvement initiative. As public schools struggle to rebound from both pandemic-induced and other longstanding challenges, Arkansas' implementation of the PLC at Work process demonstrates the necessity of its structure and provides insights for other states seeking to bolster collaboration between school districts and private-sector entities like Solution Tree.

First, **bipartisan leadership is indispensable.**

The state of public education can be a polarizing subject. However, with the full support of the Arkansas State Legislature and administrative branches, the PLC at Work process was successful from planning to implementation.

Second, **incremental change can be extraordinarily impactful.** With just ten schools added to the program for the first several years, the state of Arkansas could properly effect meaningful cultural change. In time, the program grew more rapidly and saw a statewide educational culture shift beginning to take effect.

Third, **buy-in from school administrators — particularly the principal — is essential.**

The concepts and practices reflected in the PLC at Work process are powerful. However, these extensive offerings can only be as valuable as the time granted to teachers for collaborative work and the level of administrative reinforcement.

Fourth, **higher education must be viewed as an integral piece of the school improvement matrix.** These institutions often prepare teachers and school administrators to help lead statewide school improvement discussions. In Arkansas' case, colleges and universities were encouraged to begin teaching PLC at Work principles to future teachers as well as educators pursuing continuing education courses.

Finally, **statewide school improvements may correlate with higher student-teacher morale.** Simply put, educators want — and deserve — to be empowered and recognized as they perform a difficult and complex job. To achieve greater results, Solution Tree not only seeks legislative action, but also creates environments where teachers and students can thrive.

By Johnny Key and Robert Eaker

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