



Schools and Districts Use Resources Wisely to Increase Achievement and Graduate More Students

In a time of reduced funding, schools are meeting the challenge to continue improving classroom practices, student achievement and graduation rates. Many schools and teachers are forming networks to exchange information via the Internet as they tap into free electronic resources. Career/technical (CT) instructors are teaching students about Internet technology increasingly used by business and industry. Principals are making it possible for teachers to work together to focus on solutions to school and classroom challenges, while teachers are opening their classrooms to administrators and peers who can offer ways to fine-tune instruction. Many schools have learned the value of having a school improvement consultant to share methods of school and classroom enhancement that have proven effective in other educational settings.

Honing Presentation Skills for a Successful Webinar

The technology of business and industry continues to change rapidly, prompting CT teachers to stay in tune with the technical knowledge and skills students need to be college- and career-ready.

“Webinars have become a mainstream business practice with nine of 10 professionals,” said SREB school improvement consultant **Leslie Carson**. A 2009 survey by the 1080 Group, a consulting training firm led by Roger Courville, showed that

91 percent of business professionals had attended a webinar and that they intended to increase their use of webinars substantially over the next six months. “The ability to conduct a successful webinar is fast becoming a communication skill that CT students should master,” Carson said. Industry uses webinars for training, marketing and collaboration.

Courville’s three pillars of engagement are keys to a successful webinar: story, design and presentation. Effective presenters describe the problem to be solved, offer a way to find an answer through training or a product, and provide a pathway for reaching the solution.

“In designing a webinar experience, a teacher or other presenter needs to be attentive to the participation level of the group, plan how to improve what the participants remember about the problem or the solution, and ensure that participants remain active during the session,” Carson said. She offers these hints for designing a webinar:

- Make only one point per PowerPoint slide. This is contrary to the old rule of listing three concepts on each slide.
- A 1080 Group survey revealed that 88 percent of webinar participants multi-task during webinars. Remember that participants can read a slide faster than the presenter can talk. When the presenter spends too much time on one slide, participants are inclined to multi-task during the presentation.
- Call on brain research showing that the brain reacts to change. Participants are waiting for a slide to change. Keep the slides moving to engage participants in the session.



“The ability to conduct a successful webinar is fast becoming a communication skill that CT students should master.”

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- Provide speaker notes to participants the day after the webinar. Notes are a good reminder of the main points of the session. Be sure to include contact information.

“Be mindful of your virtual body language,” Carson said. “Show a photo of yourself at the beginning of the webinar and display it again when you pause to answer questions. You want to look friendly, inviting and interested.”

Social Media Can Help Schools Personalize Professional Development

Many teachers are using social media — a combination of technology and social interaction — to pursue professional development anytime and anywhere. They are forming Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) through Twitter, Nings and blogs as they seek tools, ideas and conversations to hone their teaching strategies.

“Schools may want to explore the use of social media to deliver or extend professional development,” said **Nancy Blair**, SREB school improvement consultant. “The technology is usually free.”

Blair suggested schools use these Internet-based services to improve teaching and learning:

- **VoiceThread** — <http://voicethread.com/>
This service makes it possible for schools to explore a topic or conduct a book study. Bill Ferriter, co-author of *Building a Professional Learning Community at Work: A Guide to the First Year*, used VoiceThread to conduct a focused conversation on school-based interventions with Richard and Rebecca DuFour on Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap.
- **Diigo** — <http://www.diigo.com/>
This social bookmarking service houses bookmarks online and allows the creation of topic and interest groups. Users can highlight, annotate and comment on articles as well as bookmark items of interest to the group. Every member of the group is notified of a bookmarked item. Schools can use Diigo to focus conversations and explorations on specific topics.
- **Ning** — <http://www.ning.com/>
Ning allows users to create their own social websites. Pearson, a leader in online and offline education, underwrites the cost for educators. Two Nings that allow participants to engage in conversations or seek answers to questions are Classroom 2.0 (<http://www.classroom20.com/>) and the Educator’s PLN (<http://edupln.com/>)

- **Twitter** — <https://twitter.com/>

The education community has embraced Twitter as a way to collaborate and share information worldwide. Many schools have created “hashtags” — words or phrases preceded by a hash symbol (#) — to make it easy to follow all tweets related to those schools. Educators can add structure by establishing topic “chats” occurring at specific times. Most chats are archived to be accessible for later review. See a list of scheduled chats at <http://cybraryman.com/chats.html>.

Other Web 2.0 tools that lend themselves to delivering or extending professional development include *blogs* related to specific topics; *wikis* for gathering, collecting and sharing information; *podcasts/vodcasts* for sharing ideas and classroom practices; *live streaming* of learning opportunities for participants who cannot attend; and *Skype* or *ooVoo* to conduct group conversations via audio or video.

Online scheduling tools are available to help schools determine the best time for professional development without the need to phone or e-mail multiple individuals multiple times. These include <http://whenisgood.net/>, <http://www.timetomeet.info/> and <http://www.agreedate.com/>.

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Teachers Go on Camera to Improve Classroom Instruction and Student Achievement

Mabank Junior High School (MJHS) in Mabank, Texas, uses modern technology to engage teachers in watching and benefitting from images of their classroom management and instruction. The purpose is for teachers to be able to contemplate and modify their teaching strategies for raising student achievement.

“The first thing we did was to make video camera recordings of some master teachers for everyone to observe and critique,” Assistant Principal **David Brown** said. “Then we taped other teachers who volunteered to participate.” The tapes were converted to DVD format for teachers and mentors to observe. “Administrators did not watch the DVDs or try to evaluate the teachers,” Brown said. “We wanted teachers to be the ones to use and discuss them.”

All MJHS teachers participated in the program, although they were apprehensive in the beginning that the process might be a way for administrators to monitor their classes. When teachers realized that the method was internal within their teams, they appreciated the feedback from peers.

MJHS teachers use a self-reflection document to address seven instructional standards, make positive comments about instruction and identify areas for improvement. The reports are given to the team leader so that each standard can be discussed. The process encourages experienced as well as new teachers to modify and improve their techniques.

Standard 1: Learning Outcomes — The teacher communicates measurable learning outcomes, checks to see if students understand expectations and responds appropriately to student feedback.

Standard 2: Utilization of Instructional Media and Materials — Classroom materials meet the identified needs of students and integrate the critical elements of instruction. Teachers not only should follow published instructions for instructional materials but should be prepared to modify, adapt and integrate the materials with media and technology.

Standard 3: Instructional Techniques — Effective teachers understand and believe that how they teach is as important as what they teach. They constantly validate and/or modify teaching and learning behaviors based on cues that surface or are elicited during the lesson.

Standard 4: Academic Learning, Time and Student Involvement — The amount of time students are engaged in learning is associated with the amount learned. To achieve maximum results from instruction, teachers should ensure that no time is wasted during instruction, students’ independent work or transition from one learning activity to another.

Standard 5: Classroom Discipline — Effective teaching and learning are impossible to achieve in a disorderly, distracting and/or threatening environment. Teachers should implement classroom rules, procedures and consequences consistently to ensure positive student behavior.

Standard 6: Instructional Style — Enthusiastic instruction based on an interest in students, the subject and the act of teaching will enhance the quality of learning.

Standard 7: Monitoring Student Progress — Teachers are urged to gather student progress information while teaching, since that is when the information is most needed. Daily samples of student achievement data will allow teachers to modify instruction immediately and make longer-term decisions.

“This process has enabled teachers to improve their classrooms and to make them more student friendly,” Brown said. “The level of engagement has increased throughout the building, and teachers have become more comfortable working as a team. Overall, the process has promoted more effective collaboration.”

The video cameras used to record instruction cost about \$400 each, which is “much less expensive than hiring and training new teachers,” Brown said.



“The level of engagement has increased throughout the building, and teachers have become more comfortable working as a team. Overall, the process has promoted more effective collaboration.”

David Brown
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Teachers Working Together: Ways to Support School Improvement

Principals who want all teachers to be on the same page in continuous school improvement can take a number of actions to move the faculty in the right direction. The first step is for principals to build a culture of teacher collaboration.

“Teachers working together is not about developing relationships through social activities,” said **Joe Yeager**, SREB school improvement consultant. “It’s about advancing the school’s goals and supporting student learning through more effective instructional practices.”

Yeager said teachers benefit from spending time together. “Morale improves and camaraderie occurs naturally as a result of teamwork,” he said. Yeager outlined three ways to increase solidarity among teachers:

- **Focus Groups** — Teams of teachers with various responsibilities and interests share a common purpose to make school count for all students. Focus groups can be whole-faculty study groups or professional learning communities (PLCs). Each group focuses on a particular aspect of school improvement and takes the lead in making positive changes. “Focus group meetings should follow an agenda and appropriate meeting procedures,” Yeager said. “Every team member should know his or her role, and all team members should follow-through with commitments.” One member prepares minutes of the meeting to submit to a designated school leader. Every decision is brought to the school leadership team or the general faculty prior to implementation. “Faculty input is important during the decision-making process,” Yeager said. Focus groups need to meet regularly and evaluate their actions.
- **Tuning Protocols** — Teachers present actual work before a group of “critical friends” in a structured, reflective discussion aimed at “tuning the work” to higher standards. The process involves an introduction, a teacher presentation, clarifying questions, a sample examination, note-taking, feedback, reflection and debriefing. “Tuning protocols work because they are risk-free in determining what makes a difference in learning,” Yeager said. “Presenters feel good and learn from the experience, their work receives serious consideration, and participants learn new instructional techniques.” Tuning protocols allow teachers to take charge of their professional development in a new type of environment that encourages small learning communities.
- **Demonstration Classrooms** — This type of teacher cooperation may follow professional development, workshops or conferences. Teachers practice what they have learned while other teachers observe in the classroom. “This strategy reduces isolation, increases professional rapport and facilitates the use of effective teaching techniques,” Yeager said. It builds teamwork among peer observers and promotes greater administrative support for instructional excellence.

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Removing the Fear of First-Year Teaching at a High-Achieving School

Gra ves County High School (GCHS) in Mayfield, Kentucky, leaves nothing to chance when preparing new faculty members to assimilate into the school culture of high expectations and achievement. The school uses an approach designed to develop the skills of teachers, whether they are new to the profession or new to the school. “The purpose is to ensure that all staff members know what is expected at GCHS,” said **Jennifer Tilford**, academy principal.

The nearly 1,400 students at GCHS are organized into four small learning communities — a freshman academy and three career academies. The career academies include fine arts and health sciences; business and information technology; and math, science, engineering and agriculture. The school contracted with SREB to provide school improvement coaching and training in using literacy across the curriculum and implementing the *High Schools That Work* (HSTW) Key Practices.

GCHS is a leader in carrying out the *HSTW* school improvement design. It is an *HSTW* Pacesetter School and was identified as one of the top 100 high-implementation *HSTW* sites in the network in 2010.

Professional development for new teachers at GCHS includes eight modules to be completed during the first year of service. Teachers begin with Module 6 on relationships.

Module 1 — Classroom Management and Organization/
Knowing What to Teach

Module 2 — How to Teach Effectively Using Technology
Tools and Resources

Module 3 — Research-Based Best Instructional Practices

Module 4 — Literacy (Reading and Writing Across the
Curriculum)

- Module 5 — Continuous Student Assessment
- Module 6 — Relationships — Getting to Know Students and Parents
- Module 7 — Learning-Centered School Principles
- Module 8 — Differentiated Instruction

“This year-long program addresses teachers’ first-year fears, boosts confidence and ensures the use of research-based instructional practices,” Tilford said.

All new teachers in the district complete the modules together. GCHS had 20 new faculty members in 2009-2010 but only five in 2010-2011 due to budget cuts. Teachers earn one professional development day for completing all of the modules. “We have never had a new teacher who did not complete the modules,” Tilford said.

Members of the district instructional leadership team, composed of teachers and administrators from throughout the district, conduct the sessions. The sessions are scheduled one day per month from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Principals and teacher mentors monitor the implementation of the best practices in walkthroughs and formal observations.

“The program has resulted in all new teachers speaking the same language and understanding the school’s expectations for higher student achievement,” Tilford said. “Classroom management and student engagement definitely have improved because of the skills learned in the sessions.”

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Active, Engaging Instructional Strategies Make a Difference in Learning

Could classroom delivery at your school use a boost? At **Lenape Technical School** in Ford City, Pennsylvania, **Troy Collier**, social studies teacher and dean of students, and **Dan Veronesi**, English/language arts and social studies teacher and instructional strategies coach, use multiple strategies to energize classrooms, enrich instruction and engage students in learning.

Along with colleague **Jason Zimmerman**, blueprint reading teacher and instructional strategies coach, Collier and Veronesi have developed strategies for a book titled *The Teacher’s Cookbook: 25 Engaging Instructional Strategies for All Content Areas*. The book, which is expected to be available by fall 2011, includes these teaching techniques:

- **Learning Links** — This group writing activity is designed to generate discussion of a topic or to review previously learned material. Each student writes a statement about an issue or a response to a prompt and passes the sheet to the next group member, who marks the statement with a symbol of agreement, disagreement or “new information.” The second member writes his or her response and passes the sheet to the next member. Every group member gets a chance to read and mark all of the responses. The resulting document can be used as a study guide, a discussion prompt or a topic for further group investigation.
- **Bilateral Line-Up** — The teacher makes a controversial statement and asks students to take sides. Students form a line, beginning with the staunchest supporter of the statement and ending with the student who disagrees most with the statement. Students with moderate viewpoints are in the middle of the line. The teacher “folds the line” so that the first student in line (the strongest supporter) faces the last student in line (the most vehement opponent) for a discussion of the topic. At the end of the activity, students change places based on their current feelings. The teacher may ask students to report what they heard about the statement from others.
- **Visual Vocabulary** — Working individually or in groups, students use paper and pencil to draw the meaning of a word.
- **Visual Representation** — Students construct a 3-D representation of the definition of a word.
- **SKIM** — This method enables teachers to preview text in any content area. Students **s**kim the text to get a general sense of the topic and how it is organized. They look for **k**ey visuals, including diagrams, maps, charts or pictures that add to the content. Then they **i**dentify information found in titles, headings and subtitles. Finally, they **m**ake three predictions about what they will learn from reading the text. A graphic organizer is useful to collect information during SKIM and to add more details. The SKIM strategy helps students focus on and capture important information from difficult reading assignments.



Active learning strategies enable teachers to focus on student-centered learning, to create lessons that meet the specific learning needs of students and to give better formative assessments.

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- **Midway Slips** — Similar to exit slips, midway slips are collected during a lesson to show whether students understand new learning and to gauge their reactions to fresh information. The approach allows teachers to adjust instruction accordingly.
- **Finish the Thought** — The purpose of this strategy is to fine-tune cause-and-effect learning. The teacher begins a thought and asks students to write the ending — or the teacher supplies the result and asks students to write the beginning. Students may be asked to tell where they found information to write their part of the statement.
- **Sleuth** — Using the five Ws and an H (who, what, where, when, why and how) of good newspaper reporting, the teacher provides a graphic organizer based on a reading or other information provided in class and guides students to answer the questions.
- **Double- and Triple-Column Journals** — This note-taking strategy helps students organize complicated information in any subject by writing a term in the first column and a definition or key ideas in the middle column, then drawing the term or concept in the third column. The multiple representations help students recall information.
- **Cubed View** — Each surface of a cube becomes a visual aid by containing a question about a topic, the name of a character in a story or a view about a particular concept. Students roll the cube and respond to the prompt that appears. This activity prepares students to look at information in multiple ways.
- **Know³** — Students focus on levels of knowledge of a topic or concept by writing responses to: *I know*, *I know I don't know* and *I know I'd like to know*. This strategy helps students concentrate on their learning goals and what they need to study to accomplish the goals.

Active learning strategies enable teachers to focus on student-centered learning, to create lessons that meet the specific learning needs of students and to give better formative assessments. Students benefit from clearly defined learning targets, opportunities to work in pairs or groups, time to reflect and practice, and the expectation that they will evaluate resources instead of simply find answers. Many of the strategies allow for kinesthetic, visual, tactile and auditory learning. “Students say they enjoy coming to class when these activities are available,” Collier said.

The percentage of Lenape Tech students scoring Proficient in reading on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) increased from 35.6 percent in 2008-2009 to 49.6 percent in 2009-2010. The percentage scoring Proficient in math climbed from 22.9 percent to 38.6 percent in the same period. Additionally, students maintained or surpassed high levels of performance in almost all career/technical fields on the NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) written and performance exams from 2008-2009 to 2009-2010.

Collier and Veronesi have noticed improvement in students’ attitudes, behavior and knowledge acquisition in class. Zimmerman has seen progress in entrance and exit exam results among students in his blueprint reading classes.

“We don’t claim that our strategies are solely responsible for this impressive data,” Collier said. “Lenape Tech is aligned with *High Schools That Work* to provide a culture of high expectations for students and instructors — and we are glad to contribute in any way we can.”

Job-Embedded Professional Development Improves Student Achievement

Professional development at **Arundel High School** (AHS) in Gambrills, Maryland, consists of job-embedded activities focused on raising the academic performance of all students, including minorities and special education students. “We have designed our professional development to meet the needs of every learner,” Assistant Principal **Gina Davenport** said. “The program has become part of the school culture and is a professional expectation.”

When the professional development plan took effect in 2009-2010, the school had a gap of almost 30 percent between the achievement of special education students and that of all students on the Maryland School Assessment of reading and math. While a growing number of students from all groups were enrolling in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, only 54 percent were passing the AP exams with a score of 3 or higher.

Student achievement has improved since the professional development program began. The reading and math gaps on the state assessment were reduced to less than 25 percent for special education students and less than 5 percent for black students. Fifty-five percent of AP students passed AP exams with scores of 3 or higher in 2010 despite a 30 percent increase in the number of students taking AP courses.

“Our ninth-grade retention rate dropped from 10.10 percent in 2007-2008 to 4.25 percent in 2009-2010,” Davenport said. “The average GPA for all students was 3.09 in the first quarter of 2010-2011, rising from 2.88 in the first quarter of 2009-2010.”



“During a time of budget cuts and high accountability, one of the supports we can provide our teachers is a program of high-quality, relevant, differentiated professional development.”

Gina Davenport
Arundel High School

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Teachers Requested It

The impetus for the program was a desire by teachers to increase their knowledge of differentiated strategies to support diverse learners in the classroom without sacrificing rigor required by the curriculum. “We wanted teachers to receive training and practice in understanding the essential questions of the curriculum, building meaningful and valuable lessons, pre-assessing students’ strengths and needs, providing access to all learners, and using formative and summative assessments to document student growth and drive instruction,” Davenport said.

All AHS teachers in grades nine through 12 and vertical team members from feeder middle grades schools participate in professional development, which is taught by teacher leaders from the high school. The entire AHS administrative staff and selected school counselors also take part.

Teachers choose from 58 professional development activities, including book studies, workshops, round-table discussions on specific topics, video modules, electronic postings and reflections, journaling, leadership training, online coaching from consultants, peer coaching and classroom walkthroughs. Each teacher receives a timeline and an agenda listing each event, the learning outcome(s), the activities and strategies, and credit to be earned toward certification renewal.

Session Topics

Workshop topics include the definition of rigor, unpacking the standards, using homework effectively, elements of successful differentiation, cooperative learning and using pre-assessments. Some sessions focus on using technology to enhance instruction. Two books studied during the first year were *Never Work Harder Than Your Students* by Robyn Jackson and *Rigor is NOT a Four-Letter Word* by Barbara Blackburn.

After using new strategies and techniques in the classroom, teachers join an electronic discussion board where they reflect on questions and provide feedback on what worked, how to modify activities and what to do in the future. “This activity encourages teachers to use their new knowledge and to collaborate with their colleagues in improving instruction,” Davenport said.

AHS aims to achieve four specific outcomes from professional development:

- Teachers will adopt attitudes and strategies to support traditionally under-represented students to succeed with rigorous course work.
- Teachers will accurately assess and address the learning needs of all students and will differentiate their instruction to meet those needs without sacrificing the rigor of their courses.
- Teachers will promote equity of access to rigorous course work for a greater range of students.
- Instructional leaders will use ongoing, job-embedded coaching techniques to support teachers in implementing differentiated instructional strategies in their lessons.

To evaluate the success of the program after the first year, each teacher answered questions about its usefulness. Teachers said they benefitted from the sessions and appreciated the convenience of meeting in the building. Many of them offered to facilitate future sessions and were given opportunities to share their expertise.

Observational data indicate that the program is a success. Information collected from administrative observations and walkthroughs is shared with the staff each month. “Additional sessions have been added to the program to increase results,” Davenport said. “During a time of budget cuts and high accountability, one of the supports we can provide our teachers is a program of high-quality, relevant, differentiated professional development.”

Multi-District Best Practices Conference Builds Enthusiasm for Professional Development



“Conference participants say on their evaluations that they enjoy hearing real teachers describe strategies that work in the classroom.”

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High school and middle grades leaders and teachers from 24 school districts in west central Arkansas look forward to an annual best practices conference each summer. The event is a collaboration involving SREB and the **Dawson Perkins Consortia** in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. It is funded by the **Dawson Education Cooperative**.

The first conference in 2009 was prompted by Technical Assistance Visits (TAVs), *HSTW* and Middle Grades Assessment scores, and student and teacher surveys revealing the need for more student engagement and additional high-yield instructional practices at schools in seven counties. More than 400 educators attended the two-day conference featuring 43 presenters and 90 break-out sessions. It was held at Magnet Cove High School in Malvern. An expanded three-day version in 2010 had 51 presenters and 138 break-out sessions. The location was Gurdon High School in Gurdon, Arkansas.

The 2011 conference is scheduled for July 13-14 at Malvern High School in Malvern, Arkansas. It will focus on effective instructional strategies, student engagement and the Common Core State Standards. Several sessions will feature technical skills attainment in career/technical education.

The best practices conference has many characteristics that research has identified as part of high-quality professional development:

- Integrated with district goals to improve education
- Guided by a coherent long-term plan
- Driven by disaggregated data on student achievement
- Designed to meet teacher-identified needs
- Primarily school-based
- Provides a strong foundation in subject content and instructional methods
- Informed by research on teaching and learning
- Designed around collaborative problem solving
- Enables teachers to work together in and beyond the school building
- Ongoing with follow-up support for further learning
- Based on principles of adult learning
- Provides time and other resources to support new techniques
- Evaluated on how it impacts teacher effectiveness and student learning

“TAV teams identified good teaching techniques at many of our schools, along with teachers’ willingness to share and learn from each other,” said **Beth Neel**, teacher center coordinator for Dawson Education Cooperative. “Conference participants say on their evaluations that they enjoy hearing real teachers describe strategies that work in the classroom.”

Planning for the annual best practices conference begins about a year in advance — as soon as exam results and other information have been compiled. “We base our conference topics on the data,” Neel said. “Superintendents and principals confirm the topics and/or propose new ones.”

Evidence has shown that the conferences are effective. An SREB school improvement consultant has observed teachers using more high-yield strategies and students engaging more actively in learning. Principals report the conferences are among the best training opportunities available for their teachers.

Teacher Study Group Contributes to Success of Wildcat Hour Extra-Help Program

The original Wildcat Hour extra-help program at **Arundel High School** (AHS) in Gambrills, Maryland, lasted less than a year before the principal cancelled it for lack of cooperation from students and some staff members. When students, parents and staff called for reinstatement of the program, the principal asked a professional learning community (PLC) of teachers to study the concept and come up with a solution.

The AHS enrollment of more than 1,800 students is 61 percent white, 30 percent black, 5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 4 percent Hispanic. Twelve percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; 10 percent are special needs students.

By February 2009, Wildcat Hour was restored with mandatory tutoring for struggling students and stiff disciplinary action for failure to attend. The PLC continued to meet, recommending the addition of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to Wildcat Hour. The core purposes remain the same: tutoring, make-up assignments, testing practice, emphasis on math and writing skills, homework help and Advanced Placement (AP) course support.

Student Matrix

Students use a matrix to plan their Wildcat Hour time effectively. They select a supervised location, such as the media center or a computer lab, and remain there for a full session. They also meet their personal needs during the midday program, including eating lunch and attending club meetings and other activities.

Parents support the program by volunteering in the office, the media center and the computer labs. Some teachers help keep order in the hallways, the café and the school courtyard.

Teachers and administrators point to numerous benefits from Wildcat Hour extra help and intervention, including higher grade-point averages (GPAs), greater school attendance and fewer discipline referrals. The overall school GPA rose from 2.72 in 2007-2008 to 2.86 in 2009-2010. Attendance increased from 94.7 percent in 2007-2008 to 95.1 percent in 2009-2010. Discipline referrals in those years declined from 1,843 to 1,535.

“Afternoon classes are more focused, with fewer interruptions,” said Principal **Sharon Stratton**. “Students have a full hour during the school day to study, receive tutoring, make up work and do homework. They have more access to teachers and resources than in the past.”

Success Factors

Many factors have contributed to the success of Wildcat Hour:

- Constant monitoring and accountability
- Administrative and district office support
- Student leadership
- Careful assignment of teachers’ responsibilities
- Strong schoolwide emphasis on learning, extra help and redoing work
- Time for school counselors to meet with student groups
- Career cluster presentations by speakers from the business community
- Guest speakers from postsecondary institutions
- Computer and media center access
- Clubs and other activities



“Students have a full hour during the school day to study, receive tutoring, make up work and do homework. They have more access to teachers and resources than in the past.”

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Giving Teachers Time and Support to Improve a Middle Grades School

When **Elease Lee** became principal of **Woolfolk Middle School** (WMS) in Yazoo City, Mississippi, in 2007, she looked at low state exam scores and the school's status of "In Improvement" based on failure to meet AYP, and she knew things had to change. "To be successful, we had to instill the desire for change and empower our teachers to make it happen," Lee said. As a result, WMS met AYP for the first time in 2009.

In a rural area of the state, WMS enrolls a student population that is 99 percent black and 1 percent other ethnicities. Ninety-three percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

WMS joined the SREB *MMGW* initiative before the 2008-2009 school year. The school began receiving help from an SREB school improvement coach and took a team of teachers to the *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in summer 2008.

The principal took three key steps in 2008-2009 that resulted in increased student achievement, particularly in reading:

1. She received permission to **change the schedule** to include two planning periods for teachers in the core subjects of English, math, science and social studies. WMS has seven academic periods and one lunch/wellness period in an eight-period day. The school follows the classic middle grades model of dividing each class into two teams of four core subjects each. In the new schedule, the core teachers have common planning time with their departments during the first four periods of the day and meeting time with their teams during the last three periods. Students attend elective or enrichment classes and extra-help labs while core teachers meet together.
2. **Literacy and numeracy coaches** were added to the staff. To maximize common planning time and to support the school's emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, the literacy coach began meeting with English and social studies teachers. The numeracy coach met with math and science teachers three days a week to assist with integrated learning, data analysis and common assessments.
3. Leaders and teachers also adopted a number of **extra-help strategies**, including the Power of I (Incomplete) grading policy; Response to Intervention (RTI) periods using departmental and/or team planning time to work one-on-one with at-risk students; morning, after-school and Saturday tutorials with transportation provided for students; computer-based intervention labs; and content integration planned through team meetings.

Data analysis in 2009-2010 led to new ways of raising student achievement.

- The WMS numeracy coach became the "**Math Wiz**," donning a wizard hat and cape each Tuesday and Thursday to enhance students' math knowledge and skills.
- With guidance from the literacy coach, the entire staff **focused on reading and vocabulary** with the "Million Word Campaign." Teachers worked together in team meetings to decide how to monitor the words read by students to achieve a goal of reading one million words during the school year. A special event to kick off the campaign took place in the gym at the opening of school to motivate students to learn new words and to read as many books as possible. The superintendent, principal, assistant principal, teachers and other staff members modeled good reading habits by announcing new words daily on the intercom and introducing books of the month. Ninety-three percent of students met the Million Words goal in 2009-2010. It was projected that 95 percent would meet the goal in 2010-2011.

Another schedule change provided time for intensive extra help for students prior to the Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2) in 2010. Tuesdays and Thursdays were reorganized into a block schedule of 90-minute periods. English/language arts and reading were integrated into core courses on Tuesday, while math was integrated into core courses on Thursday. The integrated lesson plans were developed cooperatively during teachers' common planning periods. In addition, the elective teachers provided one-on-one instruction to students with specific weaknesses identified in benchmark assessments.

The principal and assistant principals support teachers through administrative follow-through for efforts to raise student achievement. "If we wanted teachers to step up to high expectations and make needed changes, we had to hold ourselves accountable," Lee said. WMS leaders keep teachers informed through department meetings, memos, grade-level meetings and shared lesson planning. One teacher believes working together translates into student buy-in. "The harder we work, the more motivated our students become," she said.

WMS made AYP again in 2010. All scores improved in a one-year period on the MCT2 with the exception of eighth-grade language arts.



"If we wanted teachers to step up to high expectations and make needed changes, we had to hold ourselves accountable."

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Woolfolk Middle School

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The percentage of WMS students scoring Proficient or above in language arts increased from 26 percent to 40 percent for sixth-graders and from 29 percent to 38 percent for seventh-graders between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. The percentage of students scoring Proficient or above on the MCT2 mathematics exam climbed from 21 percent in 2008-2009 to 41 percent in 2009-2010 for sixth-graders, from 29 percent to 61 percent for seventh-graders and from 38 percent to 41 percent for eighth-graders.

Teaming for Results: A Principal and an SREB School Improvement Consultant Work Together at a Large High School

With 2,700 students, **Akins High School** (AHS) is the second largest high school in Austin, Texas. Principal **Daniel Girard** and **Martha Quijano**, SREB school improvement consultant, began working together in 2008 on a campus leadership team to improve school and classroom practices and raise student achievement.

“A high-minority school such as Akins High School has different needs,” Girard said. “I found I could rely on Ms. Quijano to understand the problems and help me provide the best learning experiences for our students.” Quijano was asked to focus on four main areas:

- Serve as a coach, mentor and colleague.
- Extend the principal’s reach by serving as another set of eyes and hands.
- Train and coach the staff.
- Be an advocate for needed changes.

To ensure a common vision for the school, Girard and Quijano revisited the *HSTW* Key Practices to find opportunities to carry out each practice more fully. The AHS organization of career-themed academies is evaluated constantly through use of the SREB small learning communities rubric.

“The consultant helped me review everything being done on campus, asking whether it was beneficial to both students and adults,” Girard said.

Untangling a Web

When Girard became principal of AHS in 2007-2008, he found inconsistencies and misunderstandings within the school. “We had five academies with five grading plans, five advisory plans and five literacy plans,” he said. “In untangling the web, it was helpful to have both a new principal and an experienced school improvement consultant to determine what could and should be done to make the school more effective.”

Realizing that he could not be everywhere at once in a large school with more than 180 teachers, Girard asked Quijano to represent him at some meetings to ensure that critical items on the principal’s agenda were being completed. One task that Quijano handled was to create an academy roll call by building a profile of each student. “We needed this information, but it was time consuming and teachers doubted it could be done,” Girard said. Another item on the principal’s agenda was to monitor grading practices. Quijano helped ensure that a grade of A meant the same thing in different classrooms.

“As a consultant, I was able to build the capacity of the staff through targeted training and coaching,” Quijano said. For example, she conducted workshops to help each career academy develop a program of high-quality student projects.

Other schools can make the most of a principal-consultant relationship by asking the consultant to be a critical friend, an extension of the principal’s reach, an instructional trainer and coach, and a “change agent” to support the principal in advancing the school improvement agenda.

Akins High School joined schools in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) with higher socioeconomic levels and fewer minority students in achieving the Recognized accountability rating from the state in 2010. Gains occurred in the percentages of AHS students passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests in English, math, science and social studies between 2008 and 2010. AHS students participating in the *HSTW* Assessment showed substantial gains in completing the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum and meeting college- and career-readiness goals between 2008 and 2010. The mean scores of these students in reading, math and science showed double-digit increases.

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