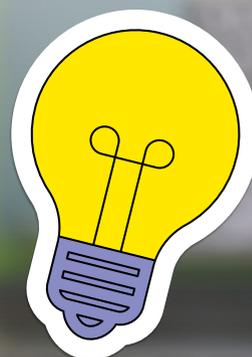


EVIDENCE OF Excellence in Education



Success stories from today's changemakers

PLC at Work® pg 9 | RTI at Work™ pg 27 | Accelerated Learning pg 39
Beyond Labels pg 51 | Mathematics at Work™ pg 57 | Marzano Resources pg 63



Success stories from today's changemakers

Dear educators and school leaders,

In a time when the demands on educators continue to grow—and the stakes have never felt higher—your work matters more than ever. Across the country, teachers and administrators are navigating significant challenges: from staffing shortages and learning recovery to shifting priorities and increasing expectations. And yet, through it all, you continue to show up for students with resolve, care, and creativity.

At Solution Tree, we recognize that no one can—or should—do this work alone. That's why we believe so **strongly in the power of partnership.**

Effective, sustainable improvement doesn't come from one-time initiatives or top-down solutions. It comes from committed collaboration—educators working together with trusted partners to build capacity, share knowledge, and focus relentlessly on what works for students. We see ourselves as your partner, supporting and helping you achieve the goals you've set for your school or district.

That's why we've assembled this collection of stories from schools and districts who have put their trust in us. We want to share their perspective on the work they accomplished, the obstacles they faced, and the results they achieved by partnering with Solution Tree. **These success stories reflect what's possible when educators are supported in their efforts to collaborate, grow, and lead meaningful change.**

One such story comes from San Cayetano Elementary in Fillmore, California. Their journey with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work[®] process is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when a school embraces collective responsibility and continuous improvement. **I invite you to watch their video on this page and see what's possible when professional learning becomes a commitment within your culture.**

Thank you for the work you do and the example you set every day. We're honored to be part of your journey and to experience the power of partnership together.

With deep respect,

Cameron L. Rains
Chief Executive Officer, Solution Tree

See how San Cayetano Elementary and its school district embarked on a transformative PLC at Work[®] journey.



A Fillmore educator in action

FEATURED SERVICES

AI Ed: Gain AI skills to support *your* success story



WHAT IS AI ED?

AI Ed stands for **Artificial Intelligence instruction by and for Educators**. It's our new suite of AI-focused offerings designed to help schools implement AI effectively, confidently, and responsibly.

WHY IT MATTERS

Educators are seeking practical guidance, trusted resources, and a clear, strategic path to harness AI as an empowering tool for working more efficiently, elevating instruction, and supporting better student outcomes.

WHAT WE OFFER:

- **PD services:** Our experts can help you build foundational strategies to integrate AI into existing practices. Generate grade-appropriate, standards-aligned lesson plans and improve the quality and timeliness of formative assessment.
- **One- and two-day AI workshops:** Get hands-on, immersive, on-site or virtual training and custom tools that simplify team planning, personalize instruction, and help students thrive.
- **AI master class:** Learn to integrate AI confidently with this virtual, on-demand series built by educators for educators.
- **Books:** Deepen your understanding of AI and learn practical strategies for effective, ethical implementation.
- **Webinars:** Learn from expert educators in live and on-demand sessions packed with practical, classroom-ready AI strategies.
- **AI book assistants:** Gain interactive digital book companions for select best-selling resources.
- **AI educator tools:** Amplify educator impact with free AI tools that provide real-time insights, save time, and enhance focus, efficiency, and clarity.



Start your AI journey today
Click or visit:

SolutionTree.com/AIConfidence

Contact your local director of educational partnerships to achieve better student results

Brian Duggan   

Region: WA, OR

"The Pacific Northwest partners with over 40 school districts dedicated to long-term, continuous improvement in PLC and MTSS efforts through Solution Tree's PLC Cohort program."

Philip Ciano   

Region: ID, ND, SD, MT, HI, AK

"In Hawaii, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota, Solution Tree partnerships are driving meaningful collaboration, clarity, and measurable gains in student learning."

Ashley Ward   

Region: Northern CA

"I love my region because we saw literacy proficiency reach 100% in every school!"

Jorge Franco   

Region: Southern CA (Coastal)

"In Southern California, we're seeing schools strengthen collaboration and consistency across campuses, leading to meaningful gains in student learning and teacher collective efficacy."

Kristen Stez   

Region: Southern CA (Inland)

"In California, school improvement happens when teachers turn aligned assessments into action—and action into extraordinary learning growth for EACH student."

Josh Herr   

Region: CO, UT, WY

"Across Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming, educators are embracing collaborative practices that are transforming teaching and learning through Solution Tree's proven professional learning models."

Susan Rabel   

Region: West TX

"I love my role—supporting educators across Texas who work every day to help kids learn and grow."

Jennifer Ivy   

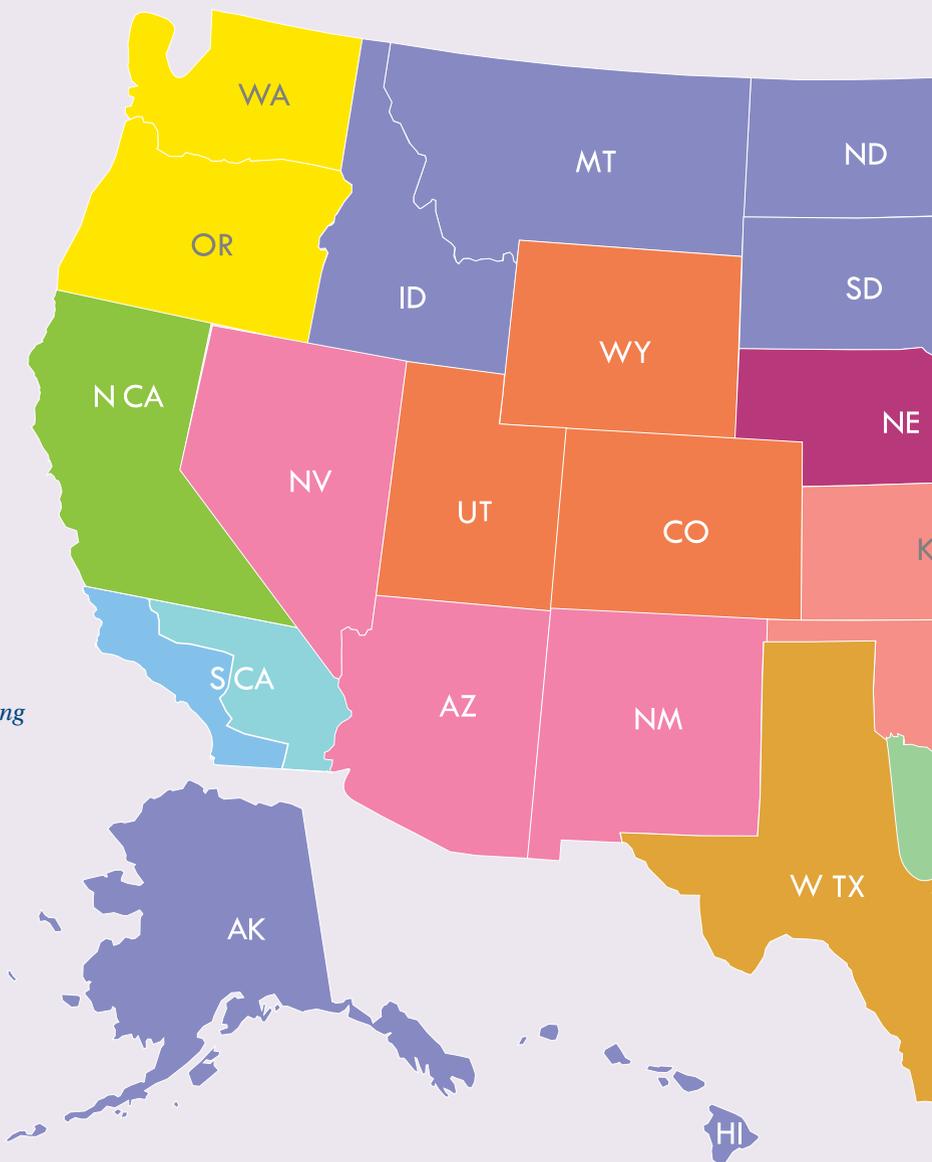
Region: East TX

"I truly value partnering with schools and districts across Texas to build cultures of learning, collaboration, and results through Solution Tree's proven professional development."

Lori Baugh   

Region: AZ, NM, NV

"I'm proud that across Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico districts partnering with Solution Tree are deepening collaborative practices that drive consistent gains in student outcomes."



Our directors of educational partnerships are available to listen to your needs and help you find a clear path for moving forward with clarity and purpose in your schools.

Marley Saville   

Region: KS, OK

"It's inspiring to see Oklahoma educators deepen their MTSS work through Solution Tree's collaborative learning approach, building cohesive systems that ensure every student receives the support they need to succeed."

Chris Stafford   

Region: MN, NE

"By building and sustaining robust, common systems, Minnesota educators are elevating student achievement and strengthening their professional capacity."

Denise Detmar   

Region: IN, MI, OH, KY

"I love celebrating collaboration and student success with educators and leaders across the Midwest!"

Andrea Thorne   

Region: NY, NJ, CT, DE, MA, ME, NH, RI, PA, VT

"New York state is proud to have the first DuFour and Eaker Ambassador Model PLC at Work® district—in addition to 24 other Model PLC at Work recognitions—thanks to the hard work the districts are putting in with the support of the NY PLC Cohort project."

Jean Burnstine   

Region: IL, WI

"From one of our district leaders in the Midwest: This PLC thing appears to work . . . We are very excited about the growth. It's a credit to your excellent work with our district!"

Heather White   

Region: MD, NC, DC, SC, VA, WV

"From West Virginia's mountains to the Carolina coasts, educators are uniting to collaborate, grow, and help every student thrive."

Jessica Tuttle   

Region: IA, MO

"Working with leaders across Iowa and Missouri feels like tending a strong school ecosystem where shared purpose, strong systems, and teacher leadership help every student flourish."

Tammy Hettrich   

Region: FL, GA

"With 1,200 educators from a single district attending a Solution Tree PLC event, Florida is raising the bar for professional learning and showing what's possible when a community invests in its teachers."

Kathy Natour   

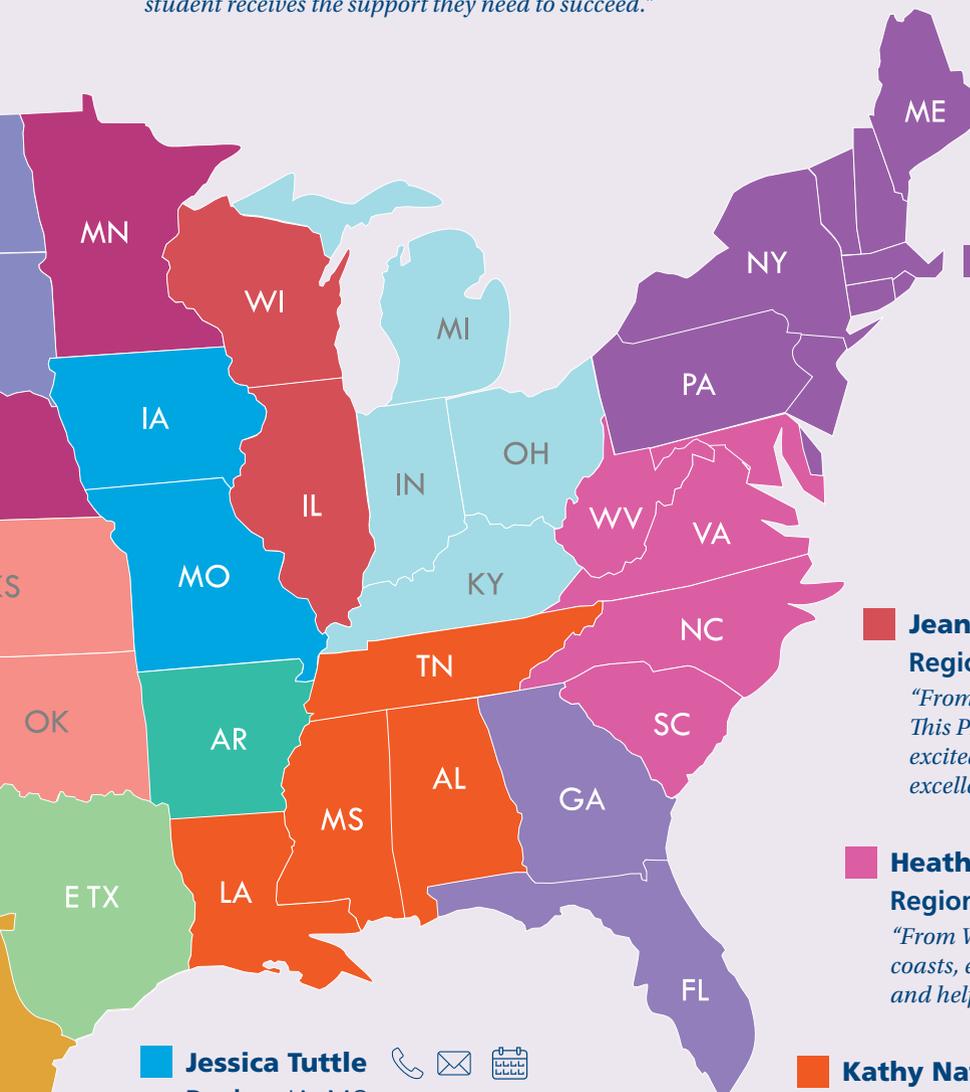
Region: TN, LA, MS, AL

"Across Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, Solution Tree is empowering educators to collaborate, share best practices, and continually grow—ensuring every student benefits from a culture of learning and excellence."

Will Nossier   

Region: AR

"We're incredibly proud of the work Arkansas schools do each day, and we're committed to supporting them as they continue striving for success for all students."



2025 Texas Tech University Research Findings

Across all grade levels, subject areas, and socioeconomic contexts in Texas, Model PLC at Work® schools outperformed statewide averages.



What is a Model PLC at Work® school?

Solution Tree's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process empowers educators to engage in collective inquiry and action research for better student results. It is designed to foster a culture of collaboration, a focus on learning, and student-centered, results-oriented decision making. Schools may apply for Model PLC at Work designation, which recognizes exemplary implementation of the PLC at Work process and at least three years of measurable improvements in student achievement.

What did the report evaluate?

In the three-part 2025 report, *Exploring the Effectiveness of the PLC at Work® Process in Texas Elementary and Middle Schools*, researchers at the Texas Tech University Center for Innovative Research in Change, Leadership, and Education examined the characteristics of Model PLC at Work schools in Texas and compared their academic growth over time to state averages and matched schools to investigate causal relationships between the PLC at Work process and educational outcomes.



What did the report find?

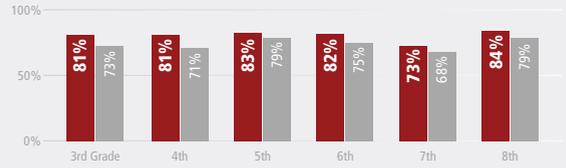
“*Ultimately, our findings suggest that the PLC at Work® process offers a sustainable pathway for schools and districts to accelerate learning while stabilizing their educator workforce, a return on investment that benefits students, educators, and communities alike.*”

Report 1 Key Findings

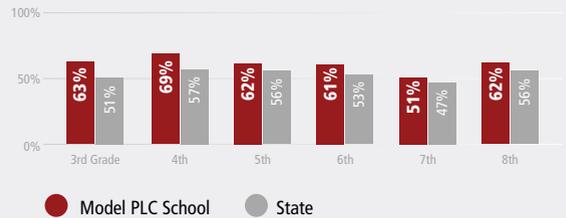
Consistent impact across grade, subject, and poverty levels

“This study suggests that schools fully engaged in Solution Tree’s PLC at Work process... are consistently associated with higher levels of student academic performance. These patterns are evident across grade levels, subject areas, and socioeconomic contexts...”

2023 STAAR Math Proficiency Comparison



2023 STAAR RLA Proficiency Comparison



Report 2 Key Findings

Accelerated Student Gains in Model PLC at Work Schools:

+3.3 Months of Additional Learning in Math **+2.0** Months of Additional Learning in Reading

Accelerated gains for economically disadvantaged students:

+4.1 Months of Additional Learning in Math

Accelerated gains for English Language Learners:

+3.3 Months of Additional Learning in Math

Statistically significant acceleration of student learning

“The patterns we observe... are suggestive of a credibly causal relationship between PLC implementation and student achievement...”

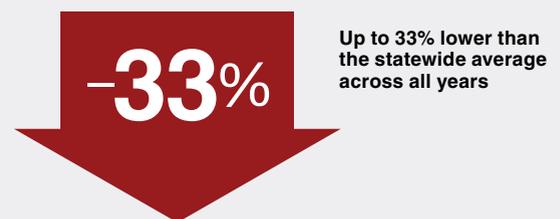
Report 3 Key Findings

Consistently lower teacher turnover than statewide averages

“Turnover in Model PLC schools is consistently lower than statewide averages, suggesting that the PLC at Work process creates organizational cultures that already support higher-than-average teacher stability.”

Teacher turnover disrupts students and their learning process, so increased teacher retention means greater student success.

Teacher Turnover Rates in Model PLC Schools:



In addition, highly effective teachers were more likely to stay in Model PLC schools, while turnover modestly increased among less effective teachers.

Source: Mansell, K. E. & Kirksey, J. J. (2025). *Exploring the effectiveness of the PLC at Work® process in Texas schools* (Report) Center for Innovative Research in Change, Leadership, and Education, Texas Tech University.

FEATURED EVENTS

PLC
AT WORK[®]
INSTITUTES

Where
learning
thrives

Witness effective hands-on strategies in action at our PLC at Work[®] Institutes. Hear inspiring stories and get the support you need to transform your school or district.



Ready. Set. PLC.
Sign up today.
Click or visit:

SolutionTree.com/Institutes26EOE



JOIN US FOR THE 2026 PLC AT WORK[®] INSTITUTES

May 27–29 | Tulsa, Oklahoma

June 3–5 | Las Vegas, Nevada

June 8–10 | San Antonio, Texas

June 9–11 | Des Moines, Iowa

June 16–18 | St. Charles, Missouri

June 22–24 | Madison, Wisconsin

June 23–25 | Denver, Colorado

July 8–10 | Charlotte, North Carolina

July 20–22 | Orlando, Florida

July 20–22 | Sacramento, California

July 27–29 | Lincolnshire, Illinois

August 3–5 | Tacoma, Washington

August 10–12 | Grand Rapids, Michigan

August 12–14 | Spokane, Washington

October 14–16 | Pasadena, California

November 16–18 | San Antonio, Texas

December 8–10 | Salt Lake City, Utah



Solution Tree



LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER



Why educators can trust PLC at Work[®] to deliver results

Luis F. Cruz shares why PLC at Work is the right fit for any school or district—no matter the size, geographic location, or issues of focus.



Built on three big ideas—a focus on learning, a culture of collaboration, and a results orientation—the Professional Learning Communities at Work[®] process equips educators to answer four essential questions:

1. **What do we want students to learn?**
2. **How will we know if they have learned it?**
3. **What will we do if they haven't learned it?**
4. **How will we extend learning for students who are already proficient?**

The Evidence of Excellence stories in this section illustrate how our proven PLC at Work framework empowers teachers with the tools, shared knowledge, and systemwide processes to take collective responsibility for student success.



Ready to build a collaborative culture focused on learning and results?

SolutionTree.com/Changemakers

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.



DOES IT WORK

AND IS IT DOABLE?



PLCS AT WORK[®] AND EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

ROBERT EAKER, EdD

Discussions regarding any school improvement framework invariably lead to the following questions: Does it work? Is there evidence that the framework will positively impact student learning? Is it doable? Can the processes and practices be successfully implemented in schools and school districts? The PLC at Work framework is not exempt from these fundamental, pragmatic questions, and there is ample evidence that when the PLC at Work processes and practices are implemented with *fidelity and specificity*, the answer to all these questions is an emphatic yes!

Research-Based Evidence

Addressing the questions of “Does it work, and what evidence of effectiveness is available?” begins with the broader context regarding research-based best practices. PLCs at Work can be viewed as a collection of research-based effective practices that are organized in a framework that makes the total process both effective and doable. At the most basic level, reviewing

the evidence of effectiveness of the PLCs at Work processes and practices rests on three basic assumptions.

First, the processes and practices that form the Professional Learning Communities at Work framework are grounded in research-based concepts and practices from within the field of professional education. A review of the references in the PLCs at Work literature reflects the best thinking and practices from a wide variety of educational researchers, practitioners, and writers. The framework is more than a collection of random ideas. Rather, it is a collection of research-based effective practices that are organized into specific processes and practices. The second assumption is that the research base that undergirds the Professional Learning Communities at Work framework is not limited to the field of professional education. Readers of DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) *Professional Learning Communities at Work* will find references from a variety of professions—business, leadership, organizational effectiveness, and cultural change, to name a few.

The third assumption regarding evidence of effectiveness is based on the idea that there are at least two ways to address the question of effectiveness. One way to seek evidence of effectiveness is to ask, "Is there evidence that the various *individual* practices central to the PLCs at Work process are effective?" For example, are there research findings that support the use of collaborative teaming? Is there evidence of effectiveness regarding the development and use of a guaranteed and viable curriculum? Is there evidence of effectiveness regarding monitoring student learning on a frequent and timely basis through the use of commonly developed formative assessments? And, given the fact that students (and adults) learn at different rates and in different ways, is there evidence that both student and adult learning is improved when there is an effective plan to provide systematic time and support for those who are struggling with their learning? Similarly, wouldn't the same hold true for extending the learning of students who demonstrate proficiency? The second way to seek evidence of effectiveness is by reviewing evidence of the efficacy of the Professional Learning Communities at Work processes and practices when viewed as a collective whole. So, beyond the effectiveness of the *individual* practices that collectively form the Professional Learning Communities at Work framework, is there evidence of effectiveness regarding the overarching framework and processes? In other words, is there evidence that the PLCs at Work process has a positive impact on student learning?

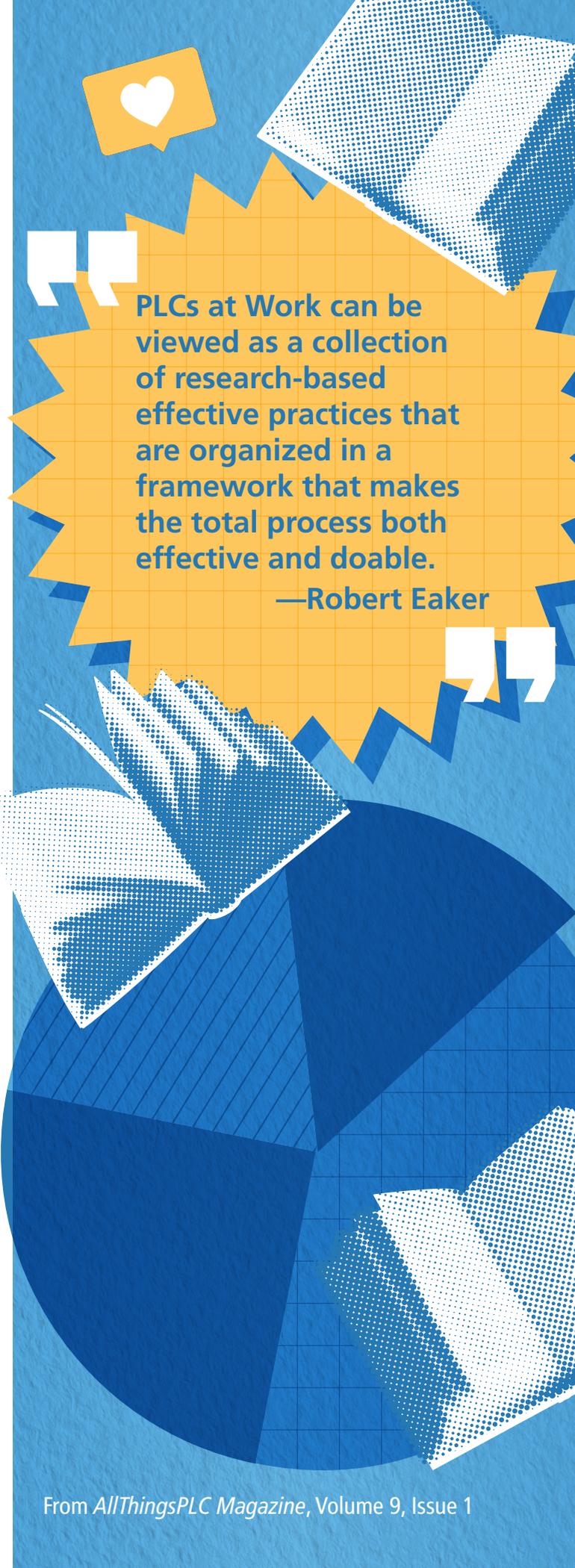
There is ample evidence that student learning is enhanced when schools implement the *entire* Professional Learning Communities at Work process with *specificity* and *fidelity*. Importantly, there is evidence that the process has a positive impact on other aspects of schooling as well, such as leadership, adult learning, teaching, culture, and professional satisfaction.

The appendix in *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work*, second edition (DuFour et al., 2021), contains a brief summary from a variety of sources of solid evidence of effectiveness. Additionally, the website allthingsplc.info contains a summary of evidence of effectiveness. Increasingly, a number of doctoral dissertations explore the efficacy of PLCs at Work processes and practices. (See Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations at ndltd.org.) In short, there is solid research-based evidence that the Professional Learning Communities at Work process is effective for improving student learning, and the evidence continues to expand.

References

- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Mattos, M., & Muhammad, A. (2021). *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: Proven insights for sustained, substantive school improvement*. Solution Tree Press.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. National Educational Service.

Robert Eaker is professor emeritus at Middle Tennessee State University.



PLCs at Work can be viewed as a collection of research-based effective practices that are organized in a framework that makes the total process both effective and doable.

—Robert Eaker



837 STUDENTS / 100% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 17% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 19% SPECIAL NEEDS

34.7% BLACK / 32.7% WHITE / 20.9% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 10% MULTIRACIAL / 1.2% ASIAN / 0.5% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Hot Springs Junior Academy (HSJA), led by Principal William Brazle, embarked on its journey with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process in 2020. The school was in Cohort 4 of the PLC at Work Project through Solution Tree’s partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education.

Prior to joining the cohort and implementing the PLC at Work process, teachers at HSJA primarily worked in isolation, lacking a clear connection to a shared mission and vision, according to Principal Brazle. Additionally, the existing curriculum didn’t consistently provide all students access to grade-level instruction, focusing mainly on addressing missing foundational skills.

This lack of cohesion was evident in the variations between grade-level English and math teams, for example. While teams existed, their approaches and priorities varied widely. One grade might excel in formative assessments, while another focused on data analysis, creating a fragmented and inconsistent learning experience for students.

When Principal Brazle came to the school in 2021, HSJA was in its second year of the PLC process, and its primary need was to get teachers on the same page. This required creating a framework to align team efforts and ensure consistency across grade levels and subjects. The journey toward this goal began with the recognition that a unified approach was essential to achieving their desired outcome.

IMPLEMENTATION

Principal Brazle and the HSJA team took a proactive and multifaceted approach to implementing the PLC at Work process, ensuring all teachers followed the same approach to instruction.

Recognizing the need for alignment, Brazle prioritized creating a unified system. He connected with Brig Leane, a

Solution Tree PLC at Work associate with over 20 years of experience in education as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in a variety of settings. Together, they began with standardizing practices across grade levels and departments.

HSJA developed a guiding coalition to guide teams and focus on the four critical questions of a PLC. Teachers began transitioning from working in isolation to working within teacher teams. Teacher teams also determined essential standards and built a guaranteed and viable curriculum to ensure high levels of learning for all students.

Brazle then restructured HSJA’s master schedule to allow for dedicated department meetings, fostering collaboration and vertical alignment. The introduction of their essential skill planner—a comprehensive unit plan template—streamlined planning and ensured that all teachers addressed key elements of instruction, from essential standards and CFAs to interventions and extensions, fostering consistency and effectiveness across the seventh- to ninth-grade classrooms.

Brazle also prioritized professional development, leveraging the Marzano High Reliability Schools framework to build a common language and approach to teaching.

Through these intentional steps, Brazle guided HSJA toward a cohesive and collaborative PLC culture. By providing structures, tools, and professional learning opportunities, he empowered teachers to work together effectively, ensuring all students received high-quality, aligned instruction.

- Joined PLC at Work® Project cohort
- PD with associate Brig Leane to unify teacher efforts and standardize practices
- Implemented the Marzano High Reliability Schools framework
- Achieved Model PLC at Work® and High Reliability Schools recognition

From isolation to recognition as a Model PLC at Work[®] school



RESULTS

The overall dedication to continuous improvement and the successful implementation of the PLC process at Hot Springs Junior Academy led to remarkable achievements. The school has seen increases across English language arts and math.

In its fourth year, the school gained recognition as a Model PLC at Work school, a testament to its commitment to collaborative, data-driven practices that foster student success. This achievement was further underscored by the school's district recognizing HSJA teachers as Teacher of the Year for two consecutive years, showcasing the positive impact of the PLC process on educator effectiveness. Kate Neighbors, an English teacher, earned the title for the 2021–2022 school year, and Kyle Stevens, a social studies teacher, earned the title for the 2023 school year.

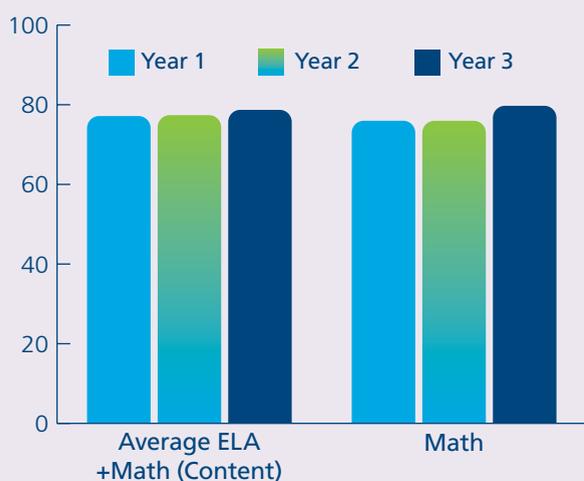
The school's focus on data-driven decision making also yielded tangible results in student performance. By targeting a schoolwide focus on writing and implementing consistent rubrics and targeted instruction, HSJA saw significant improvements in student writing across all subjects. These successes culminated in HSJA achieving High Reliability Schools Levels 1, 2, and 3, demonstrating its dedication to creating a high-performing learning environment where all students can thrive.

A positive culture shift in teachers and students was another result of the hard work and dedication of HSJA.

Students now have a more positive attitude and higher engagement in the classroom. Teachers at HSJA no longer follow a teach, test, and move-on approach. Instead, HSJA has adopted a system that prioritizes mastery learning and student support. Students no longer fear failure; they understand that if they don't grasp a concept initially, they will receive targeted reteaching and support. This shift has alleviated test anxiety and fostered a growth mindset among students. They now view assessments as opportunities for growth rather than definitive judgments of their abilities.

Principal Brazle believes this cultural shift has been instrumental in creating a more positive and empowering learning environment where students feel supported and motivated to succeed.

GROWTH SCORE FOR ALL STUDENTS 2020–2023



Source: bit.ly/4gSEsRq

Our teachers are changing our community here every day. They are ensuring that students are learning what is essential. We don't want them to just be successful seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students; we want them to be successful human beings. And that's what our teachers strive to do every day.

WILLIAM BRAZLE / PRINCIPAL



AMARILLO HIGH SCHOOL

AMARILLO, TEXAS

2,170 STUDENTS / 28% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 1.8% ENGLISH LEARNERS

67% WHITE / 21% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 5% BLACK / 3% ASIAN / 3% MULTIRACIAL / 1% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Before assuming principalship of Amarillo High School, Andrea Pfiefer had extensive experience and training with the professional learning communities (PLC) process through the Bellevue School District in Washington State. She was able to bring a deep understanding of PLC principles and practices to Amarillo. However, she found implementing the PLC process at her new school uniquely challenging. At Amarillo, PLC time was misused, and team meetings resembled more of a second conference period than a collaborative learning community.

“I knew that we needed to do work here . . . My team and I had to ask questions like ‘What do we need to do?’ or ‘Where do we need to look?’” said Andrea.

So, recognizing the need for widespread improvement, Andrea recommended Solution Tree for professional development and helped facilitate training for all high schools in the district. However, the COVID-19 shutdown in

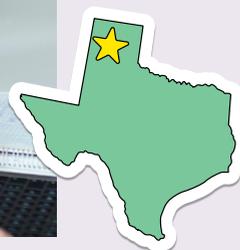
2020 halted progress and disrupted PLC at Work® efforts. When in-person school resumed in 2021–2022, she was determined to revitalize PLC at Work processes at Amarillo High School, setting the stage for significant changes and improvements.

IMPLEMENTATION

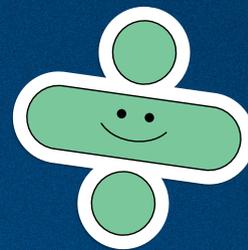
To address the challenges, the school embraced a comprehensive approach, leveraging embedded coaching as a key component. Embedded coaching involves having a Solution Tree coach work closely with teachers, providing personalized guidance and support. At Amarillo, these coaching sessions were tailored to the specific needs of each subject area. For example, algebra 1 was an area that needed improvement, so the PLC coach specifically dedicated time to work closely with the mathematics team, providing targeted support and resources to enhance instructional practices and student learning outcomes.

“We really started to see a shift occur when we implemented embedded coaching about once a month . . . and just having a third party here and another set of eyes on what we’re doing is really profound,” stated Andrea.

The instructional team met regularly to plan coaching visits, assess areas of improvement or “hotspots,” and tailor support accordingly in algebra 1, English, US history, and biology. This collaborative approach ensured that coaching efforts were aligned with the school’s overarching goals and tailored to meet the unique needs of each subject area. Through embedded coaching, teachers received ongoing support and guidance, fostering continuous growth and improvement through the PLC at Work process.



Embedded coaching drives significant growth in math and reading



RESULTS

After consistent implementation of embedded coaching, Amarillo High School's mathematics growth score went from 34 in 2022 to 60 in 2023, and the school's English language arts/reading score went from 70 in 2022 to 80 in 2023. Amarillo High School celebrated this growth and credits the results to hard work as well as the embedded coaching and structured PLC at Work processes adopted by the school.

The results at Amarillo High School highlight the importance of structured professional development and collaborative practices in driving meaningful change and improving student achievement across subjects. According to principal Pfieler, adherence to the four critical questions of a PLC was essential to the school's growth. In addition, by providing teachers with the necessary tools, training, and support through dedicated sessions with Solution Tree and embedded coaching, Amarillo High School empowered educators to implement effective instructional strategies and interventions.

-  PLC at Work® PD
-  Embedded coaching PD

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY ACADEMIC GROWTH OUTCOMES



ELA GROWTH
SCORE



MATHEMATICS
GROWTH SCORE

To see these kinds of results for kids is amazing, and we've tapped into something that works . . . and we want to keep our momentum . . . as we work on our data and culture.

ANDREA PFEIFER / PRINCIPAL

SOUTHEAST POLK COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT



PLEASANT HILL, IOWA

7,141 STUDENTS / 28.5% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 2.5% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 9.8% SPECIAL NEEDS

81% WHITE / 7% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 5% BLACK / 5% MULTIRACIAL / 2% ASIAN /
0.1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER / 0.1% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE

CHALLENGE

Southeast Polk is a unique district in that it serves several towns with a wide range of demographics 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 (PLC) 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 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 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.



PLC at Work® Institutes



Global PD Teams

Southeast Polk students boost AP passing scores to

85%

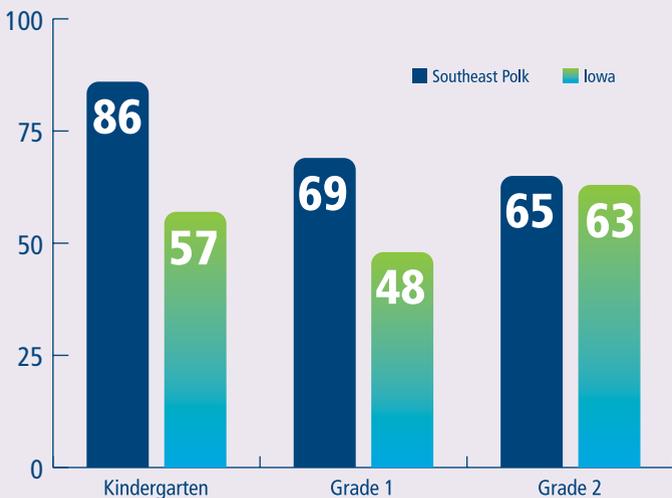
RESULTS

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.

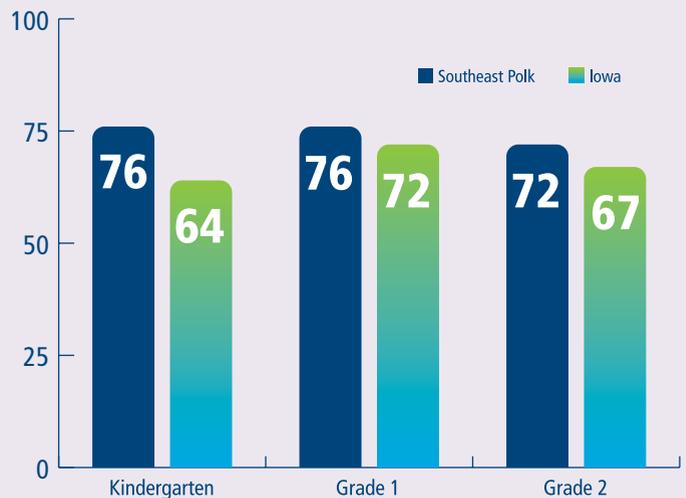
OTHER NOTEWORTHY ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 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 percentage points.
- Eighth-grade English language arts has shown three years of continuous growth in achievement.
- Student participation in the Advanced Placement (AP) exam increased by five percentage points.
- 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



1,245 STUDENTS / 50% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 13.6% SPECIAL NEEDS

70% WHITE / 10% BLACK / 2.2% MULTIRACIAL / 25% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 10% ASIAN; HAWAIIAN NATIVE OR PACIFIC ISLANDER / 3.7% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE

CHALLENGE

Before embracing the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process, Manistee Area Public Schools (MAPS) faced significant challenges, particularly concerning student assessment. Test scores revealed gaps in student mastery, indicating a lack of clarity in defining learning outcomes. The district recognized they weren't consistently meeting the needs of every student, every day, at every skill level.

Furthermore, secondary collaboration was fragmented. Teachers, often isolated in single-subject roles, lacked structured time for meaningful teamwork. While grade-level meetings occurred, they lacked focus and direction, leading to inconsistent practices. Recognizing the need for systemic change, superintendent Ronald Stoneman initiated a districtwide effort to adopt the PLC at Work process, aiming to transform their approach to teaching and learning.

IMPLEMENTATION

The transformation of MAPS to PLC at Work was deeply intertwined with a desire to enhance its assessment practices. This journey began in the 2019–2020 school year with a focus on building a strong foundation. Superintendent Stoneman and curriculum director Amber Kowatch had already fostered a collaborative culture, creating a guiding coalition to establish a shared mission and vision.

As a part of their PLC initiative, expert Geri Parscale presented the foundational understanding of PLC concepts for all staff. A core group of administrators and teachers then attended The Summit on PLC at Work in Phoenix, Arizona, in February, and upon returning, they launched a book study for *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work®* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker. The district established "Late-Start Mondays" to provide dedicated time for collaborative teams to meet and delve into the book.

This focus on assessment became particularly crucial as they navigated the challenges of hybrid and virtual learning

during the 2020 pandemic. As they navigated the return to school amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Manistee brought in PLC expert Dr. Anthony Muhammad to address the critical need for a strong, supportive school culture. Dr. Muhammad's message emphasized the importance of educators' roles in meeting students' needs, particularly during challenging times.

During the 2020–2021 school year, amidst the challenges of hybrid learning, Manistee finalized its essential standards and began preliminary discussions about assessment design. They adopted another book study, *Design in Five: Essential Phases to Create Engaging Assessment Practice* by Nicole Dimich, to guide their assessment refinement journey. The district also invested in professional development and coaching led by Angie Freese, who focused on formative and summative assessment strategies.

Additionally, they engaged in another book study, *Taking Action: A Handbook for RTI at Work™* by Austin Buffum, Mike Mattos, and Janet Malone, using it to develop better support systems for challenging behaviors. This work helped them clarify specific strategies for addressing student needs and informed their approach to intervention within the PLC framework.

In the summer of 2022, Manistee focused on strengthening its intervention systems to support its assessment goals. They participated in the RTI at Work™ Coaching Academy and Yes We Can workshops and had professional development days led by Dr. Kristen Bordonaro. These efforts resulted in more robust Tier 2 intervention programs for students K–12, and assessments were used to identify students for interventions, monitor progress, and adjust support as needed.

MAPS also developed learning progressions, which were crucial in informing assessment design and ensuring that assessments accurately measured student growth toward essential learning targets. Data protocols were established to guide data analysis and decision making within collaborative teams. In the 2023–2024 school year, they began exploring extension activities, aiming to provide enrichment for all learners.

Third-grade English proficiency increases by **74%**

RESULTS

Through this ongoing journey of learning and collaboration, MAPS successfully integrated assessment as a core component of their PLC framework, resulting in a more data-driven and responsive learning environment for all students.

This transformation led to significant improvements in student achievement, including student proficiencies:

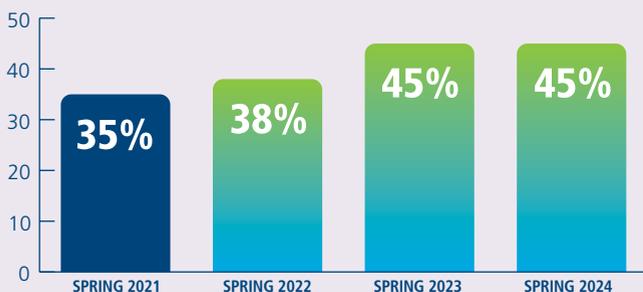
- **Kindergarten math:** Increased from 69% in 2020–2021 to 82% in 2023–2024
- **Third-grade English:** Increased from 26.20% proficiency in 2020–2021 to 45.70% in 2023–2024
- **Sixth-grade English:** Increased from 34.10% in 2020–2021 to 45.60% in 2023–2024

- The Summit on PLC at Work®
- PD with Geri Parscale
- *Learning by Doing* book study
- PD with Anthony Muhammad
- *Design in Five* book study
- PD with Angie Freese
- *Taking Action* book study
- RTI at Work™ Coaching Academy
- Yes We Can! with Kristen Bordonaro

M-STEP ELA TRENDS



M-STEP MATH TRENDS



The PLC journey for us has been invaluable, focusing on the right work—our students. By growing teacher capacity and leveraging their expertise, we're moving the student achievement needle while honoring our teachers as professionals. It's truly awesome to see this become a part of who we are as a district.

AMBER KOWATCH / CURRICULUM DIRECTOR



538 STUDENTS / 40% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 26% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 13% SPECIAL NEEDS

43% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 41% WHITE / 7% BLACK / 6% MULTIRACIAL / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Lincoln Heights Middle School began a transformative journey when they discovered Solution Tree through a teacher leadership grant. Prior to implementing the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process, the school was already making significant strides, but they recognized the need to maximize opportunities for student proficiency. With the PLC process as their guiding light, they focused on gaining more clarity about standards and ensuring that educators were on the same page and teaching the same content.

Principal Jaime Greene was resolute in clarifying the expectations of the PLC process and offering proof of content to address questions and concerns from the teachers at Lincoln Heights. It was a challenge to get all staff members fully on board, but Greene saw it as an opportunity to take her teachers to leadership workshops offered by Solution Tree.

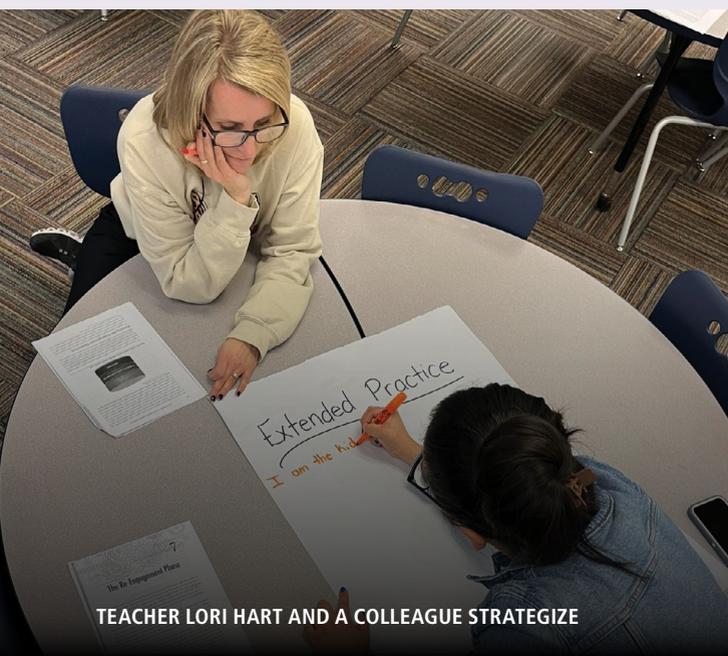
“They saw the experts, and it gave the teachers an opportunity to bond,” says Greene.

IMPLEMENTATION

Along with attending teacher leader workshops, faculty at Lincoln Heights began following the 4 Critical Questions of the PLC at Work process. Initially, the focus was on clarifying standards and objectives, addressing Questions 1 and 2: “What is it we want our students to know and be able to do?” and “How will we know if each student has learned it?” This phase ensured a clear understanding of educational goals and established methods for assessing student progress.

Transitioning the focus to Questions 3 and 4 in Year 3 was a pivotal move for Lincoln Heights. This shift not only marked a natural progression in their PLC at Work process but also provided a concrete answer to an important question: “Now what?” By addressing *how* to respond when students struggle and *how* to extend learning for those who excel, the school demonstrated a commitment to comprehensive student support and enrichment.

By establishing a guiding coalition and introducing the PLC at Work process to all staff, Lincoln Heights Middle School fostered a shared vision focused on maximizing student proficiency. This collective effort ensured that teachers were aligned in their instructional practices and delivering consistent content and support—a fundamental element for success.

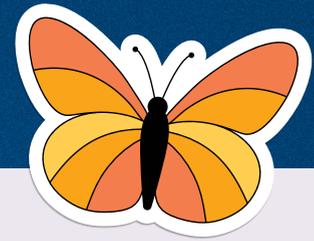


TEACHER LORI HART AND A COLLEAGUE STRATEGIZE

- Solution Tree workshops
- PLC at Work® PD
- Became Ambassador Model PLC at Work® school



A powerful transformation in student proficiency



RESULTS

Lincoln Heights witnessed an impressive increase in the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) standardized test scores. For sixth grade, English language arts (ELA) scores soared 135%. Seventh-grade students had a remarkable 265% increase in math and a 66.7% increase in social studies. Eighth graders increased their science test results by 65%.

“Once we became a Model PLC at Work, more people wanted to know what we were doing at Lincoln Heights Middle School, so we started sharing our story. It became a part of who we were,” says Greene. Teachers at Lincoln Heights became inspirational leaders for other schools by sharing their success stories, demonstrating a commitment to serve as leaders and mentors within the PLC community.

Lincoln Heights Middle School’s success affirmed staff and students’ efforts, and they felt encouraged to apply for Ambassador status, officially becoming Solution Tree’s first DuFour and Eaker Ambassador Model PLC at Work school.

“The biggest benefit to me is . . . that [the teachers believe] they *can* make a difference and that their instruction is having a positive impact on all kids—especially underserved kids . . . You can just tell that they are proud of that work in

a way that they have never been before, and that’s just what keeps us moving forward.”

OTHER NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- Decrease in discipline incidents since implementation of response to intervention, guided by *Behavior Solutions*, and coordinated multitiered system of supports (MTSS) programs.

“Once we became a Model PLC, more people wanted to know what we were doing at Lincoln Heights, so we started sharing our story. It became a part of who we were.”

JAIME GREENE / PRINCIPAL

TCAP STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES



GRADE 6 ELA



GRADE 7 MATH



GRADE 7 SOCIAL STUDIES



GRADE 8 SCIENCE



1,810 STUDENTS / 71% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 21% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 26.1% SPECIAL NEEDS

**69% WHITE / 28% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 9% MULTIRACIAL / 2% ASIAN /
1% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 1% BLACK / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER**

CHALLENGE

Berryville Public Schools had a strong tradition of academic excellence, but over time, that reputation began to slip—and teachers and leaders were feeling the pressure. The number of students requiring special education support was rising, and despite the best efforts of staff, overall student achievement was declining. The district fell from being a regional leader to ranking in the bottom third of surrounding districts.

“We had to step back and ask, ‘Are we really teaching students at grade level?’ That question became our why,” said Tammi Davis, the director of curriculum and instruction. “We’re here to serve kids—and that means ensuring they learn at high levels every day.”

Frustration grew among the staff who were working tirelessly but seeing limited results. The district lacked a system for collaboration, aligned intervention, and sustained professional development. Something had to change.

IMPLEMENTATION

Berryville’s journey with Solution Tree began with a spark of curiosity about intervention. After attending a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® Institute, district leaders began learning more about the PLC at Work process. That led to deeper engagement and ultimately a four-year partnership focused on building essential standards, improving leadership, and transforming school culture.

The district began at the foundation: creating a clear, unified vision and mission. Leadership invited stakeholders—including teachers, support staff, and community members—to monthly meetings, where they developed a shared understanding of their purpose. While some educators initially resisted, viewing the process as just another compliance task, district leaders emphasized that this work wasn’t about mandates; it was about transforming how they do business to better serve students.

Next came training. The district sent an initial group of 15 educators to a PLC at Work Institute, followed by structured support through Cohort 6, a three-year professional learning model. They brought in a PLC associate who helped teams rethink scheduling to make time for collaboration and targeted intervention. The associate worked side by side with principals, offering a fresh lens and helping create urgency and clarity in decision making.

District leaders also participated in monthly meetings with author and associate Janel Keating, who supported leadership development and reinforced consistent messaging across schools. This work emphasized that successful PLC implementation requires visible, sustained commitment from the district level. Superintendent Owen Powell played a key role in publicly supporting the work, prioritizing time for collaboration, and aligning decisions with the district’s shared mission.

At the middle and high schools, “Smart Start Mondays” were launched, which included weekly collaborative time built into the calendar so teams could plan, reflect, and respond to student needs.

PD MILESTONES

- PLC at Work® Institute
- PLC PD cohort
- On-site coaching
- Monthly meetings with Janel Keating
- “Smart Start Mondays” (built-in team time)
- Adoption of key resources: *Learning by Doing*, *Common Formative Assessment*, and *Leading PLCs at Work® Districtwide*

95%

of high school students meet or exceed their growth targets in math

RESULTS

Berryville’s commitment to the PLC at Work process led to measurable academic improvement and a stronger school culture. The middle school rose from a D to a B rating and achieved the second highest growth in the state in literacy. Additionally, 95% of high school students met or exceeded their growth targets in math.

One of the most compelling outcomes was the **significant reduction in the number of students scoring at Level 1** (the lowest tier) on the ATLAS (Arkansas Teaching, Learning & Assessment System) state assessment from 2023 to 2024. This indicates that a higher number of students scored at higher levels on the ATLAS state assessment.

“Celebrating the small wins is something we’ve done since the beginning,” said Tammi. “It keeps us positive and reminds us this is a journey.”

With improved collaboration, protected team time, and ongoing leadership support, the district built momentum over the last four years, resulting in greater academic gains, higher morale, and a districtwide commitment to learning for all.

DECREASE IN STUDENTS SCORING AT LEVEL 1 IN ELA AND MATH (2023–2024)



“*This is our why: We are here to serve kids and ensure they truly are learning.*”

TAMMI DAVIS / DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION



BERRYVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS EDUCATORS GATHER AS A TEAM AT THE PLC INSTITUTE.

EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

SAN CAYETANO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



FILLMORE, CALIFORNIA

490 STUDENTS / 80% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 35% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 23% SPECIAL NEEDS

92.8% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 6.9% WHITE / 0.2% MULTIRACIAL / 0.1% ASIAN; HAWAIIAN NATIVE OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Before partnering with Solution Tree, San Cayetano Elementary School faced deep-rooted challenges that hindered student progress. Principal Krystal Sarabia-Rocha described a culture of isolation among educators, where grade-level meetings focused more on logistics and extracurriculars than on meaningful conversations about teaching and learning. Although the school was rich in data, there was little clarity on how to use it to inform instruction. Data collection often felt like a compliance task rather than a tool for improvement.

Another significant obstacle was identifying and supporting students who needed reading intervention. With over half of the student population falling below grade level, staff struggled to allocate resources effectively. The broad identification criteria made it difficult to prioritize and differentiate support.

Recognizing that these issues couldn't be solved through surface-level fixes, Principal Sarabia-Rocha and her team actively sought a path forward. They understood that true improvement would require a fundamental cultural shift—one rooted in collaboration, clarity, and collective responsibility.

IMPLEMENTATION

Driven by a desire for meaningful change, San Cayetano Elementary School embarked on a transformative journey in the summer of 2022 by attending the Sacramento Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work[®] Institute. The school's involvement was part of a broader district initiative to implement the PLC at Work process, and Principal Sarabia-Rocha and her team eagerly opted in, recognizing the urgent need to improve student learning outcomes.

Upon returning in the 2022–2023 school year, San Cayetano received monthly on-site dedicated coaching from PLC at Work associates Aisha Thomas and Jon Yost,

ensuring consistent support. This close coaching fostered trust and guided the staff through the initial stages of PLC implementation.

As the work deepened in the 2023–2024 school year, San Cayetano also benefited from content-specific coaching while the district participated in focused professional development days led by PLC at Work associates Luis F. Cruz and Anthony Muhammad.

The San Cayetano team embraced structured support, beginning with clarifying essential standards, writing and administering common formative assessments (CFAs), and introducing a schoolwide WIN (What I Need) intervention time.

Transparency around data and collaboration became nonnegotiable. To effectively track student progress, the school collaboratively developed a schoolwide template for monitoring CFA proficiency, ensuring a consistent approach to data collection and analysis. Those shared data sheets allowed every teacher to see progress across grade levels, which fostered vertical alignment and collective responsibility.

- Sacramento PLC at Work[®] Institute
- PD with Aisha Thomas and Jon Yost
- PD with Luis F. Cruz and Anthony Muhammad
- Earned Promising Practices School



PROMISING
PRACTICES
SCHOOL



Math proficiency for students with disabilities soars

15%

RESULTS

By the end of the second year of their PLC journey, San Cayetano Elementary began to witness significant positive shifts.

- Fourth-grade English language arts (ELA) scores increased by 10%, and math scores rose by 11%.
- Third-grade math scores saw an impressive 16% growth on state assessments.
- The school also saw a 5% increase in both ELA and math proficiency for their English learner population and a remarkable 15% growth in math for students with disabilities.

This data, achieved within a relatively short time frame, underscored the power of collaborative practices, targeted interventions facilitated by “WIN Time,” and a clear focus on essential standards.

The transformation extended beyond academics, fostering a renewed sense of purpose and collaboration among the staff, who now operate with a shared understanding of student data and a commitment to continuous improvement.

In 2024, Solution Tree awarded San Cayetano Elementary School the distinction of Promising Practices School for their dedication to implementing the PLC at Work process.

See more results from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress:

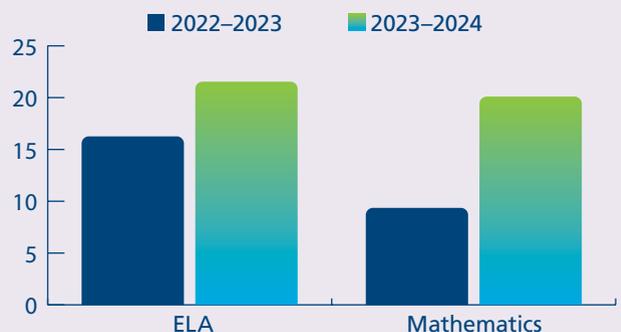
ELA: The percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards has increased steadily from 16.26% in the 2022–2023 school year to 21.54% in the 2023–2024 school year.

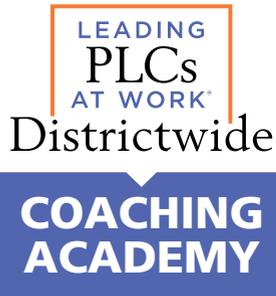
Math: San Cayetano experienced remarkable improvement in students meeting or exceeding standards, from 9.36% (2022–2023 school year) to 20.10% (2023–2024 school year), more than doubling the previous year’s percentage.

“The journey wasn’t without its initial bumps. Change can be challenging, but the power of seeing results firsthand is undeniable. When a long-serving teacher expressed, ‘We’re tired of running in circles ... this works,’ it resonated deeply. It marked a pivotal moment where the entire San Cayetano community united around a singular, powerful goal: ensuring high levels of learning for all our children.”

KRYSTAL SARABIA-ROCHA / PRINCIPAL

STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING STANDARDS



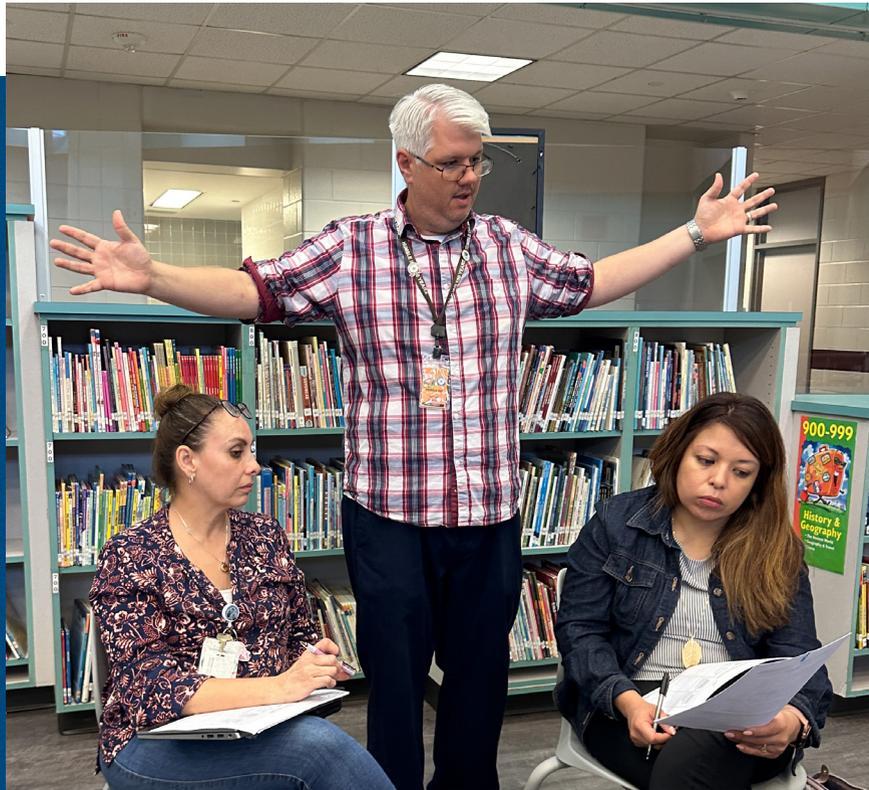


Create leadership at every level

The Leading PLCs at Work® Districtwide Coaching Academy centers on the belief that professional learning communities need to be pervasive throughout the district. So, in-depth training is given on the concepts, tools, and best practices for school districts as they work to create leadership at every level—from the board of education to building-level teacher teams.

Our comprehensive, six-day program includes:

- **Day 1 & 2 | School Board and Superintendent Team:** Establish a strong foundation for districtwide collaboration and data-driven decision making.
- **Day 3 & 4 | District Leadership Team:** Empower principals to lead as district leaders and foster a culture of continuous learning.
- **Day 5 & 6 | Teacher Collaborative Teams/Envisioning an Aligned District:** Deepen teacher collaboration, implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and monitor student learning for continuous improvement.



Align the work of every PLC team within your district. Inspire professional learning communities to achieve continuous improvement and a guaranteed and viable curriculum for every student.

JANEL KEATING



Inquire about our newest coaching academy
Scan the code or visit:

SolutionTree.com/DistrictwideExcellence



Solution Tree

The right support for every learner

RTI at Work™ cocreator Mike Mattos offers clarity on what you can expect from RTI at Work PD.



Early intervention makes all the difference, and addressing learning gaps before they widen ensures every student can succeed. RTI at Work™ gives educators a practical, research-based framework to implement response to intervention (RTI) and multitiered systems of supports (MTSS) with confidence, consistency, and measurable impact.

At the heart of RTI at Work are two essential questions from PLC at Work®:

1. **How will we respond when students don't learn?**
2. **How will we respond when students already know it?**

By addressing these questions, educators can provide timely interventions for struggling students and enrichment for those who have already mastered key concepts. This ensures instruction is tailored, progress is monitored, and every student receives the support they need to succeed.



Ready to address intervention challenges? Let's talk!

[SolutionTree.com/Changemakers](https://www.solutiontree.com/changemakers)

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.

Collective Responsibility, Real Results

BY MIKE MATTOS



The recent release of the 2024 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) results* quantified the sobering reality facing educators today—our students have not recovered from the devastating impact of the pandemic. Most students are significantly below grade-level in the critical foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. Compounding these academic challenges, the pandemic continues to impact the emotional well-being of our

students. A majority of secondary students report consistent feelings of stress or anxiety, which in turn has created unprecedented levels of absenteeism. And these severe increases in student needs is a main reason why teachers report frequent job-related stress and burnout.

If we do not effectively address students' educational gaps, we will have a lost generation—the “pandemic kids” who had vital years of their childhood disrupted, socially distanced, and sheltered in place. At the same time, successfully intervening for students cannot come at the cost of educators' personal time, resources, and well-being. RTI at Work™ is a research-based, practitioner-validated process to achieve these goals.

In RTI at Work's approach to creating a multitiered system of supports (MTSS), all students have access to rigorous grade-level essential curriculum during Tier 1 instruction.



The entire staff must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for student learning.

MIKE MATTOS



We will not successfully close learning gaps by removing students from new essential grade-level curriculum. Students must learn this year's essential grade-level standards while closing their learning gaps.

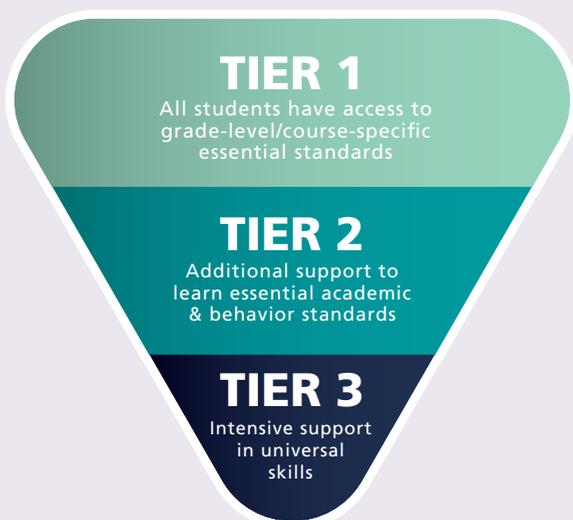
Undoubtedly, some students will not master every new essential grade-level standard by the end of a unit of study. That is the primary purpose of Tier 2—to systematically and collectively provide additional time and support to ensure all students learn essential grade-level academic and behavior standards by the end of the year. And as the NAEP scores confirmed, some students will undoubtedly enter a new school year lacking critical prerequisite skills. That is the purpose of Tier 3: to provide



Successfully intervening for students cannot come at the cost of educators' . . . well-being.

MIKE MATTOS

intensive reinforcements in critical foundational skills. Because it is impossible to provide all three tiers of support within an individual teacher's classroom, the entire staff must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for student learning. Fortunately, our profession has near-unanimous agreement on how best to structure a school or district to collaboratively ensure student and adult learning—educators would deeply commit to being a professional learning community (PLC). When implemented well, the PLC process is the best way to build the learning-focused culture, collaborative structures, instructional focus, and assessment information necessary to successfully respond when students don't learn.



*NCES.Ed.Gov/NationsReportCard

DEER VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



PHOENIX, ARIZONA

32,131 STUDENTS / 34% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 4.4% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 13% SPECIAL NEEDS

61.5% WHITE / 22.9% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 5.6% MULTIRACIAL / 5.2% ASIAN / 3.5% BLACK / 1% AMERICAN INDIAN / 0.4% HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

While academic multitiered system of supports (MTSS) structures were in place at Deer Valley Unified School District (DVUSD), the need for a more systematic approach to behavioral support became apparent. Administrators observed an increase in behavioral incidents post-COVID, a trend supported by rising suspension rates and anecdotal reports from educators, including Jessica Tucker, MTSS behavior specialist, regarding students' difficulties with emotional regulation.

At the start, district leaders set an ambitious goal: to reduce suspensions by 25%. Meeting this goal required navigating additional challenges, including the changing composition of the teaching staff, with many new educators entering the profession through alternative pathways, often lacking experience in behavior management. The fluidity of staffing due to substitute rotations and increased class sizes added further strain, underscoring the urgent need to reinforce proactive behavioral supports throughout DVUSD.

IMPLEMENTATION

In 2021, DVUSD embarked on a multiyear implementation plan, spearheaded by Jessica Tucker and Gary Diaz Zehrbach, PhD, deputy superintendent of administrative leadership and services, to address student behavior.

The shift began when an MTSS specialist from DVUSD, attending the Summit on RTI at Work™ in Austin, Texas, came across the book *Behavior Solutions*, by John Hannigan, Jessica Djabrayan Hannigan, Mike Mattos, and Austin Buffum. Inspired, Dr. Zehrbach championed a districtwide book study in the 2021–2022 school year, involving leaders from all departments. This initiative laid the foundation for a shared understanding and commitment to change.

During the 2022–2023 school year, district and pilot teams participated in the **Behavior Solutions: A Practical Road Map for Behavior Success in All Tiers** virtual workshop, deepening their understanding and laying the foundation for active implementation.

Soon after, the DVUSD team held a pivotal professional development meeting with John and Jessica Hannigan to

officially launch a multiyear coaching plan. This meeting was instrumental in clarifying the district's vision, outlining expected outcomes, and reinforcing the depth of its long-term commitment.

To further support their efforts, district and pilot school teams attended the RTI at Work™ Institute in Phoenix, Arizona, where school leadership teams began formalizing their implementation strategies. This collaborative work with the Hannigans helped establish the framework for a K–12 districtwide rollout of Behavior Solutions™, ensuring alignment and consistency across all sites.

DVUSD also established behavior academies in select schools to provide targeted support for students with persistent behavioral challenges. Created by John and Jessica Hannigan, and presented in the book *Behavior Academies*, this approach offers a structured pathway for intervention, skill-building, and reentry into general education. In 2023–2024, the district deepened its commitment by embedding essential academic and social behaviors into its five-year strategic plan and Portrait of a Graduate initiative—while also launching districtwide training on Tier 1 behavioral prevention with direct support from central office leaders and the Hannigans.

-  The Summit on RTI at Work™
-  Behavior Solutions book study
-  Behavior Solutions: A Practical Road Map for SEL Success in All Tiers (virtual workshop)
-  Professional Development meeting with John and Jessica Hannigan
-  RTI at Work™ Institute
-  Behavior Academies book study
-  Achieved Model PLC at Work® district recognition



Student suspension rate drops by

65%

RESULTS

Three years into implementing Behavior Solutions, DVUSD is seeing measurable success. A consistent, proactive approach to student behavior has helped foster a more positive school culture where students feel supported and emotionally equipped to learn.

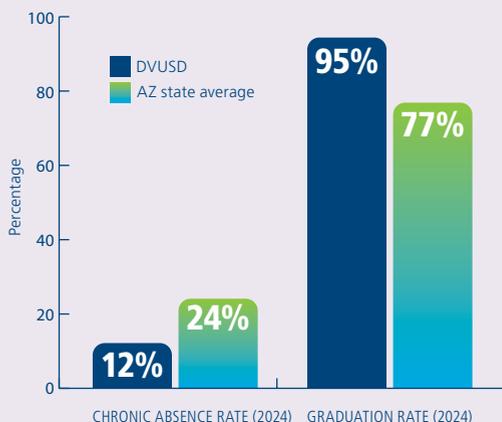
BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY NOTEWORTHY:

- Districtwide suspensions have dropped significantly, while teacher support for handling student discipline rose from 60% to 98%.
- The district achieved a 53% decrease in suspensions in year one and an additional 25% decrease in year two.
- One high school reported zero suspensions in one month, a milestone achievement for a school with zero tolerance policies.
- In a high school Behavior Academy, 25 of 30 students successfully exited, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted intervention.

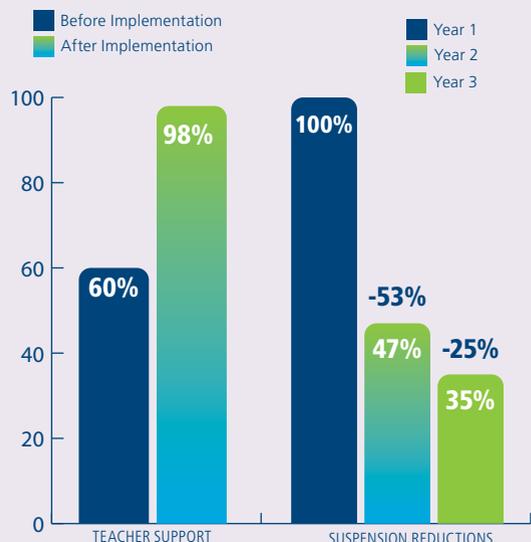
THE DISTRICT HAS ALSO ACHIEVED REMARKABLE ACADEMIC SUCCESS:

- 27 schools earned an A rating from the Arizona State Board of Education in the 2023–2024 school year
- 28 schools received the prestigious A+ School of Excellence award. Students consistently outperformed the state average on FY 2024 assessments by 13 points in math, 11 in English language arts, and 18 in science.
- 14 schools were recognized by the state of Arizona in 2024–2025 for effective schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention Systems: 12 for Tier 1 implementation, one for Tier 1 and Tier 2, and one for Tier 1, 2, and 3.
- The district earned Model PLC at Work recognition in 2021.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR & PERFORMANCE METRICS



IMPACT OF BEHAVIOR SOLUTIONS™ ON TEACHERS AND SUSPENSIONS





306 STUDENTS / 100% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 32.5% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 26.3% SPECIAL NEEDS

32.5% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 27.2% BLACK / 26% WHITE / 14.2% MULTIRACIAL

CHALLENGE

At Highland Elementary School, Principal Michelle Deime knew her students were struggling, and she wanted more for them. From what Michelle understood from the district's mandate and the level of fidelity required for effective RTI at Work™, she knew her school lacked the structures for successful implementation.

Before 2021, data was collected at Highland but not used to identify essential standards or drive targeted interventions. A consistent intervention schedule was nonexistent, and Tier 1 instruction lacked fidelity. Teachers struggled to see themselves as providers of all three tiers, leading to an overreliance on pull-out programs that caused students—especially those with special needs and multilingual learners—to miss core instruction.

Collaboration was fragmented, with specialists not integrated into the master schedule and grade-level teams working in isolation. The purpose of professional learning communities was unclear, vertical alignment was missing, and misconceptions about full inclusion created hesitation among staff. Without clear training on response to intervention (RTI), behavior issues escalated, and “all means all” remained more of a slogan than a reality.

IMPLEMENTATION

In the 2021–2022 school year, as part of the districtwide RTI initiative, Highland's administrators attended an initial RTI presentation by Mike Mattos. This session laid the groundwork for understanding RTI, emphasizing the inverse triangle model and the need for consistent multitiered instruction. Administrators learned that students could require support across all three tiers without necessarily qualifying for special education. Following this, Highland brought in Solution Tree associate Kyle Palmer, who immediately began professional development sessions.

One of the first steps was strengthening professional development and collaboration with guidance from Kyle. Michelle and her team started to embrace the concept of “all means all,” recognizing that strong Tier 1 instruction is foundational. Clear norms and protocols were established for

staff meetings and PD sessions, ensuring they were structured, student-focused, and meaningful. A unified meeting space fostered collaboration and cross-grade discussions.

The following year, 2022–2023, focused on strengthening RTI practices. A significant shift involved clarifying the difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction, restructuring it as targeted instruction within the classroom, and creating a more seamless continuum of support.

Another major focus was helping teachers prioritize essential standards, deepening instruction. They analyzed student work and refined strategies in collaborative meetings, shifting from deficit-focused to instructional reflection, and tracking evidence for action.

By 2023–2024, Highland was in its third year of implementing RTI at Work practices. These efforts resulted in more strategic small-group instruction, with teachers intentionally using data to drive interventions. Collaborative student work analysis helped standardize expectations and align interventions more effectively.

Through these structured, incremental changes, Highland Elementary transitioned from a broad understanding of RTI to a purposeful, data-driven approach that prioritizes strong Tier 1 instruction, targeted interventions, and ongoing teacher reflection. The school's RTI journey has been marked by a commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed.



Our journey began with deep conversations and professional development, but the real work started with implementation. Now, we're refining our approach, fostering collaboration, and using student data to drive meaningful change. Tier 2 can feel complex, but . . . we can't overthink it—the answers are in the data.

MICHELLE DEIME / PRINCIPAL

A systematic approach drives student proficiency



RESULTS

Highland Elementary School has made remarkable strides in student achievement and school culture using the RTI at Work professional development services from the 2021–2022 school year to the 2023–2024 school year.

Data from the 2023–2024 school year shows significant growth in several key areas. Overall, student proficiency increased by 26.1% due to improvements in Tier 1 instruction. State testing revealed substantial gains, with third-grade math proficiency more than tripling and fourth-grade ELA proficiency quadrupling. Targeted vocabulary development also saw a positive shift. Discipline referrals, suicide risk assessments, and behavior incidents all decreased, creating a more positive and supportive school climate.

The RTI framework has not only improved student achievement but also fostered a more supportive, calm, and effective learning environment. Highland's success is a testament to the belief that all means all. Through their continued dedication to RTI, Highland has ensured that every student moves forward. The data shows growth—and with sustained efforts, the trajectory will only continue upward.

- RTI at Work™ PD presentation with associate Mike Mattos
- PD sessions with RTI at Work™ associate Kyle Palmer

PROFICIENCY GROWTH (READING)



ACADEMIC GROWTH

OHIO STATE TEST (OST) TRENDS

- **Third-grade math:** Increased from **2.3%** proficiency (2022–2023) to **7.5%** (2023–2024)
- **Fourth-grade ELA:** Grew from **5.6%** proficiency to **23.1%**
- **Fifth-grade ELA:** Improved from **11.4%** to **16.2%**

VOCABULARY MASTERY

A direct focus in professional development and essential standards work led to:

- **2021–2022:** 21% of students are proficient.
- **2022–2023:** 24% proficient
- **2023–2024:** 25% proficient

ALGEBRA & ALGEBRAIC THINKING

Direct alignment with fourth- and fifth-grade essential standards has strengthened conceptual understanding, resulting in an increase over two years:

- **2022–2023:** 16% proficient
- **2023–2024:** 19% proficient

BEHAVIOR & SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENTS

- **Discipline referrals:** Down 54% from 2022–2023 to 2023–2024
- **Suicide risk assessments:** Reduced by 50% (from 38 to 19 cases)
- **Behavior incidents:** Dropped 46% (from 31 to 17 incidents)

PROFICIENCY GROWTH (MATH)





1,406 STUDENTS / 42% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 13% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 18% SPECIAL NEEDS

35.4% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 24.7% ASIAN / 18.9% WHITE / 8.8% BLACK / 5.4% MULTIRACIAL / 1.1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER / 0.4% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 5.3% OTHER

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 in 2017, 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.

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.



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 / FORMER PRINCIPAL

Transforming culture and reducing suspension rate



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. In 2018–2019, there were 27 students who were re-designated as English proficient as a result of targeted intervention and support.

In 2017, there were 130 students suspended; that number dropped to 78 in 2018, 56 in 2019, and in 2020, just before COVID, JFK suspensions were in the 40s. By the time students returned in 2021, suspensions were at just 25.

The most rewarding piece of data for JFK, according to Velez, is the fact that 75% of African American 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 2020, 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
- Since 2015, Kennedy Athletic Teams have earned more than 15 California Interscholastic Federation Championships

- PLC at Work® PD
- RTI at Work™ Institute
- RTI at Work™ PD

RTI AT JFKHS: TIER 2 IMPACT ON STUDENT SUSPENSIONS





1,592 STUDENTS / 1% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 13% SPECIAL NEEDS

92% WHITE / 2% BLACK / 2% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 2% MULTIRACIAL /
1% ASIAN / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

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 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 focused and consistent, and that we were adhering to the critical elements of quality professional learning community (PLC) implementation over the course of many, many years,” said Barbara Phillips, Windsor Central’s director of learning and continuous improvement.

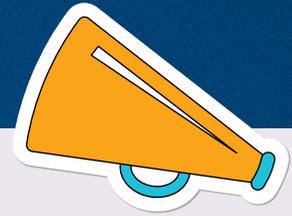
Windsor Central’s administrators and teachers also utilized key book resources, such as *Taking Action* and *Simplifying Response to Intervention*, to broaden their knowledge of RTI and inform decision making in the best interests of their students. These texts provided the staff at Windsor with the research-based, practical strategies and tools to apply to their own innovative, 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 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. Data protocols were established to guide data analysis and decision making within collaborative teams. In the 2023–2024 school year, they began exploring extension activities, aiming to provide enrichment for all learners.

- RTI at Work™ events and on-site PD
- Key resources: *Taking Action* and *Simplifying Response to Intervention*
- Implemented Extended Student Contact Model
- Developed a full-time Tier 3 interventionist team to support elementary schools districtwide
- Established data protocols to guide collaborative data analysis and decision making

Meet the nation's first DuFour and Eaker Ambassador Model PLC at Work[®] district



RESULTS

Through years of commitment to continuous improvement, Windsor Central became the first DuFour and Eaker Ambassador Model PLC at Work[®] district, earning Solution Tree's highest recognition for sustained excellence and measurable student success. The district now 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%.

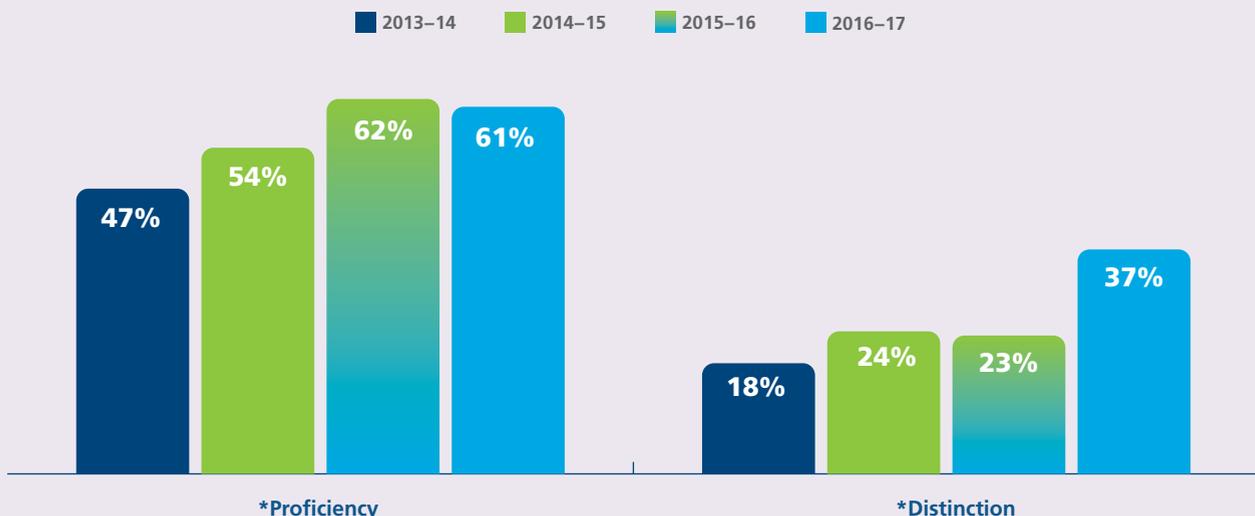
"There's been a whole lot of innovation. And part of that, from a cultural standpoint, is building that collective

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."



See how Windsor Central School District became the first DuFour and Eaker Ambassador Model PLC at Work[®] district.

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

FEATURED EVENTS



RTI
AT WORK™
INSTITUTES

From intervention to impact

APRIL 27–29 | BOISE, IDAHO

OCTOBER 7–9 | ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 2–4 | PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Join us in 2026 to learn proven strategies and collaborate with experts. Leave equipped with practical tools to strengthen instruction, intervention, and student success.



**Ready for effective
intervention?**

SolutionTree.com/Intervene2Impact



Solution Tree



The proven system for rapid, guaranteed turnaround

See it in action! Watch how the 10-day learning cycle helps educators create a culture of collaboration in which all learners, especially students, thrive.



If your school has been designated in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), or is trapped in a cycle of underperformance, you already know the stakes are high. Lack of effort isn't the problem; what you need is a system that actually works.

Accelerated Learning is the focused, decisive solution explicitly designed for turnaround environments. We adapt the globally proven PLC at Work® framework to meet your urgent needs, replacing scattered initiatives with high-leverage, research-backed routines. Your teachers and administrators will finally align their efforts on the right work—the actions guaranteed to improve learning.

We reject the myth of chronic remediation. Our experts will instead shift your staff to an acceleration mindset, providing targeted, just-in-time support that quickly builds students' capacity for grade-level success now. This focused approach delivers a rapid and sustainable shift, enabling your entire school to transition from surviving to thriving.



Ready to rise from surviving to thriving? Let's talk!

SolutionTree.com/Changemakers

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.

6

Mindsets to Accelerate Learning for All Students

By Sharon V. Kramer

Reaching students who struggle in every school

The need to close achievement gaps has been a goal in education for quite some time. The aftermath of the pandemic created an urgency inside school systems to boost student achievement—even more so with underrepresented or marginalized students. Achievement gaps between low- and high-poverty schools widened in elementary grades and increased primarily during the 2020–21 school year (Kuhfeld, Soland, & Lewis, 2022, p. 7).

Every school has students who fall behind or need extra support. Struggling students aren't confined to high-risk schools. When a student needs more

support to achieve grade level, the traditional school model says to remediate. However, the reality is that all schools, not just those labeled high-risk, have students who deserve priority attention to achieve higher levels of learning.

The question remains: how do educators address learning gaps in achievement, break free from remediation, and ensure that learning for all students doesn't remain out of reach? How can acceleration help them level up learning and move learning forward?

The six mindsets to accelerate learning

MINDSET ONE

Schools and districts are learning organizations

Setting the foundation for acceleration requires everyone to agree on the purpose or mission of their work—to collectively ensure students learn critical grade-level content. To accomplish this mission, staff and students alike become learners, creating an organization focused on using inquiry and action research to grow the learning of everyone in the building.

The focus shifts from what teachers teach to what students learn, ensuring learning is the intentional outcome of all classroom activities.

MINDSET TWO

All students can learn grade- and course-level standards

While diverse classrooms create challenges, believing all students can learn is crucial. It can sometimes be too easy to give excuses for why students might not be learning based on educational labels or outside circumstances instead of working to ensure every student learns and determining (as a team) how to make that happen.

One practice that results from a mindset that all students can learn is building solid relationships with students. Strong, positive teacher-student and student-student relationships are among the greatest conditions for learning (Hattie, 2017; Marzano, 2017).

MINDSET THREE

Formative assessment is integral to learning

For too many students and adults, the word assessment implies a singular event for the purpose of evaluation and judgment. Diagnostic teaching and learning require information from assessments to target specific student needs and misconceptions.

With acceleration, educators use assessments as part of the learning process and as a way to celebrate learning with students and grow their self-efficacy. A balanced assessment system of formative and summative assessments is necessary—formative assessments for continued teacher and student learning and summative assessments to gather data on learning after instruction.

To effectively accelerate learning, teachers and collaborative teams focus on formative assessments that provide information about how to move student learning forward in a timely manner.

MINDSET FOUR

Schools must systematically intervene to accelerate learning

Students needing extra support often get it too late, with large-scale testing delaying targeted instruction. To accelerate learning, form small groups based on the previous year's data to start interventions immediately. After gathering further data through assessments, validate or adjust the support based on the new information. This ensures continuous improvement and reduces students' time waiting for the help they need.

MINDSET FIVE

Instructional strategies should create forward-moving learning

While remediation reteaches skills in isolation, acceleration strategies integrate them seamlessly into current learning through engaging activities. This connection boosts relevance, motivation, and memory. **Learning happens effectively when we see how ideas are conceptually connected, when our minds are fully engaged, and when the tasks we encounter are motivating because they are exciting and accessible** (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020). Through this relevance, instructional practices for acceleration build student self-efficacy and engagement. School is not done to students; it is done with students.

MINDSET SIX

Everyone is a leader of learning

No matter how knowledgeable or charismatic a principal is, a single individual can never effectively lead a school alone. Every person in a school is a leader and works to support student learning. **The way the leadership communicates and supports learning makes a difference in the success of the students and the school staff.** Each school and district may need to examine its leadership structure to ensure the system is growing leaders with a shared leadership model by teaching and modeling leading the work of acceleration. A leadership team must direct and support the charge. Everyone understands that it takes the entire school community to accelerate learning and reach the goal of learning for all.

Dr. Sharon V. Kramer knows firsthand the demands and rewards of working in a PLC. An author and a leading education expert, she created Accelerated Learning professional development to help underperforming schools improve their daily practices for better student results.



Read the
full article

SolutionTree.com/6Mindsets

LEADERSHIP MAGNET SCHOOL



JONESBORO, ARKANSAS

495 STUDENTS / 94% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 12% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 19% SPECIAL NEEDS

67.7% BLACK / 15.4% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 12.9% WHITE / 3.8% MULTIRACIAL / 0.2% AMERICAN INDIAN

CHALLENGE

Leadership Magnet School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, knew it needed a cultural and instructional shift. While the staff was passionate, data showed student behavior issues and inconsistent academic growth. Teachers were working hard, but not always collaboratively, and the school lacked consistent systems for analyzing student data and responding effectively.

“We took a slow step to it. We knew that we had a lot of work to do. We wanted to start holistically, and it was more about changing the mindsets of our school,” said Kimberly Newcomb, assistant principal of school improvement.

As a school with significant challenges, Leadership Magnet required an intensive, all-in approach—shifting from compliance to commitment, building shared ownership, clarity, and continuous learning. They focused on developing capacity so everyone could lead, teams were accountable, and collaboration became highly effective, laying the foundation for lasting student success.

IMPLEMENTATION

Leadership Magnet began its partnership with Solution Tree in the summer of 2019 by sending its entire staff of 33 educators to the PLC at Work® Institute in San Antonio. That initial momentum continued through a multiyear journey marked by sustained professional learning, data-driven systems, and a strong belief in every student’s ability to learn.

A key early focus was shifting the mindset of staff. “We’re a learning institution,” said Principal Amanda Turner-Sanders. “We had to hold ourselves and our students to high expectations and start focusing more on learning—not just behavior or character education.”

After the first semester, teachers realized they didn’t need to spend time discussing students who were already progressing. Instead, they redirected their energy to students who weren’t making adequate gains. “That changed everything,” Turner-Sanders said. “The conversations became more focused and actionable. We started asking, ‘What are we going to do for this student, right now?’” This mindset shift led to more strategic planning and prescriptive data use. Teachers embraced the idea that love for students also meant expecting them to succeed, and building systems to ensure they do.



- Attended a PLC at Work® Institute
- Developed a needs assessment with Cheryl O’Leary
- *School Improvement for All* book study with Sharon V. Kramer
- *Behavior Solutions* book study
- Built collective teacher efficacy with William M. Ferriter

After implementing Accelerated Learning strategies and processes, office referrals drop by

60%

RESULTS

Over time, the changes became visible in classrooms, conversations, and data.

Office referrals dropped by 60% after implementing key strategies and processes in Accelerated Learning—including PLC at Work® and RTI at Work™. The school built Tier 2 systems to support student behavior and used data to drive the process. Teachers now view discipline through the same four PLC questions used for academic learning.

In 2021, 205 students received Tier 1 foundational phonics support. By the next year, that number had dropped to 160, reflecting improved decoding and phonemic awareness skills. With seven interventionists

and a revised master schedule, every student receives the time and support they need within the school day.

Most importantly, the culture at Leadership Magnet School has transformed. Teachers lead data conversations. Students understand their learning goals. And the school's commitment to "all means all" is more than a slogan—it's a system.

"'You enter as a team, you leave with a plan' became our mantra. This simple quote changed the way teachers approach data. It helped them look at the students who didn't understand, and ask, 'What can we do to enhance their learning?'" said Kimberly.

'You enter as a team, you leave with a plan' became our mantra. This simple quote changed the way teachers approach data.

KIMBERLY NEWCOMB / ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

DECREASE IN STUDENTS NEEDING READING SUPPORT 2023–2024





14 SCHOOLS / 8,858 STUDENTS / 69% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 31.1% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 11.8% SPECIAL NEEDS

73.9% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 9.7% BLACK / 9.2% WHITE / 3.2% ASIAN / 2.3% MULTIRACIAL / 1.5% AMERICAN INDIAN / 0.2% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Glendale faced a series of significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. As in virtually every district during this time, the pandemic severely disrupted student learning, leaving gaps in achievement and making it difficult for educators to bring their students to the next level. Additionally, teacher shortages posed an obstacle with a decline in certified staff. These issues led to inconsistent instruction and a lack of structured support for both educators and students.

In response to these challenges, Superintendent Cindy Segotta-Jones and district leaders sought a way to ensure that every student had access to high-quality instruction, regardless of their starting point. The key was creating a culture where teachers could collaborate effectively and use data-driven strategies to support student learning.

IMPLEMENTATION

As assistant superintendent, Cindy supported early efforts to implement Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work®. After becoming superintendent, she partnered with Solution Tree to strengthen the work, ensuring greater fidelity and allowing the PLC to thrive. She and her leadership team guided teachers and leaders within the district to attend institutes, summits, and professional development events focused on assessment, collaborative teams, and English learner instruction. Through these experiences, the district became even more aware of the power of PLCs and how they could transform schools.

“When you look at collaborative teams at grade levels, no one is left isolated. When you function with collaboration, it strengthens everyone,” Cindy shared.

Glendale Elementary School District ensured that professional learning was not a one-time event, but an ongoing, embedded practice through professional development. This allowed teachers to engage in meaningful training that directly impacted their daily instruction.

The district embraced best practices to build a strong PLC by establishing collaborative teams, utilizing Solution Tree resources, and engaging school leaders in meaningful learning experiences. Teachers participated in book studies centered around *Learning by Doing* and *School Improvement for All*, while school leaders received expert guidance and support from Solution Tree associates. At each grade level, collaborative teams worked together to share best practices, analyze student data, and develop targeted improvement strategies.

Implementation extended beyond teachers, school leaders, and Solution Tree associates. Students also played a vital role in their own success. With a focus on student ownership of learning, data tracking became part of daily routines, helping students track their progress and see growth. Accessible data created a mindset shift in students where success was measured daily, not just at the end of the year.

- The Summit on PLC at Work®
- PLC at Work® Institute
- Assessment, English learner, and collaborative teams PD
- *Learning by Doing* book study
- *School Improvement for All* book study

Third grade proficiency scores rise to

27%

RESULTS

Cindy does not shy away from this fundamental belief: “We are here to educate children regardless of what we are dealt,” she says. “It’s our responsibility; we owe that to our students.”

Backed by a dedicated staff, Cindy is making good on this promise. As a result of Accelerated Learning, Glendale Elementary School District has made impressive strides in third- and fifth-grade mathematics proficiency. The percentage of third-grade students meeting or exceeding proficiency rose significantly from 17.5% in the 2021–22 school year to 27.1% in 2023–24. During the same period, fifth-grade mathematics students showed notable improvement, with proficiency rates climbing from 13.4% to 20.5%.

These gains reflect the district’s dedicated focus on strengthening foundational math skills and providing targeted interventions to support all learners, helping more students not only meet standards but excel beyond them. See their results:

“When you look at collaborative teams at grade levels, no one is left isolated. When you function with collaboration, it strengthens everyone.”

CINDY SEGOTTA-JONES / SUPERINTENDENT

3RD GRADE MATHEMATICS
AASA* PERCENT PASSING



5TH GRADE MATHEMATICS
AASA* PERCENT PASSING



*Arizona’s Academic Standards Assessment

EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

IMOGENE GARNER HOOK JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL



VICTORVILLE, CALIFORNIA

1,000 STUDENTS / 78.1% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 19% ENGLISH LEARNERS

66% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 22% BLACK / 5% WHITE / 5% MULTIRACIAL / 2% ASIAN /
1% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Principal Carlos Cerna and his team's initial encounter with the professional learning communities (PLC) process began at the PLC at Work® Institute in Las Vegas, Nevada. Acknowledging the imperative to provide support to both students and staff, Cerna and his team felt compelled to take action. They collectively decided to connect with Solution Tree, marking the commencement of Imogene Garner Hook Junior High School's committed efforts to implement transformative educational practices.

"From the data, I knew the why, but I wanted to know how . . . we had to do something so that we could support our students and staff," Cerna reflected.

IMPLEMENTATION

When implementing Accelerated Learning, the school faced initial challenges typical to any educational institution. For teachers, the process required effective communication and demonstration of its efficacy, which meant there would need to be ongoing support, guidance, and consistent engagement across all teams.

To address these challenges, a structured approach was crucial. An Accelerated Learning expert from Solution Tree facilitated organizational alignment by establishing specific teams and a guiding coalition.

"Solution Tree helped us get organized and guided us along, even during distance learning," said Principal Cerna. Establishing a clear vision statement and identifying essential standards aided in sharpening the objective.

Wednesdays were strategically designated to facilitate teacher collaboration. With the assistance of their Accelerated Learning expert, they implemented a celebration tracking dashboard system in which teachers organized themselves in teacher teams. Teacher teams collaborated to identify essential skills, monitor student learning and share practices while also providing tiered support of intervention and extension activities. Principal Cerna and his staff successfully continued to implement this electronically shared

system to support their work. This initiative streamlined both planning processes and progress monitoring of the students.

The introduction of the PLC process offered a solution to the question of how to effectively monitor students and identify areas of improvement, and it's been instrumental in driving the school's success thus far.



Step 1: PLC at Work® Institute

Step 2: Accelerated Learning PD

RESULTS

Cerna says that the PLC process has made it evident that their students and staff are reaping the rewards of this initiative. As the teachers continue to grow professionally, the collaborative culture among staff is flourishing, with teachers wholeheartedly embracing the process. This increased collaboration has created a positive environment conducive to student success. These outcomes were primarily due to teachers actively engaging in the PLC process and the leadership of the guiding coalition. Student success wouldn't be possible without their teamwork. Significantly, the process has empowered teachers to systematically track student progress, resulting in noticeable enhancements in student outcomes.

"My role is to empower teams to collaborate effectively, ensuring they work together to plan and support each other," says Cerna.

As a result of the collaborative work among staff, Imogene Garner Hook Junior High School successfully exited out of Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) status into Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). Following the PLC process, the English language arts assessment increased by 21.6 points in distance from standard from 2022–2024.

The school identified additional areas of growth after comparing students who met or exceeded standards on the



Eighth-grade ELA proficiency improves by

77%

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) system over the course of three years.

- Seventh-grade ELA increased by 31.3%.
- Eighth-grade ELA increased by 76.9%.
- Seventh-grade math scores showed a 100% increase.
- Eighth-grade math scores showed a 100% increase.

ADDITIONAL KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- In mathematics (2023–2024), seven student groups transitioned from red performance level to orange, indicating these groups are getting closer to meeting the standard.
- In ELA, the distance from standard improved from 98.2 points below standard in 2022 to 81.8 points below in 2023—and further to 76.6 points below in 2024.
- The distance from standard in math rose slightly from 146 in 2022 to 148.6 in 2023, before improving to 126.8 in 2024.

“
Through the PLC process, everyone is all on the same page . . .

CARLOS CERNA / PRINCIPAL

PERCENT OF STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING CAASPP PROFICIENCY DATA (ELA)



MOLINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

295 STUDENTS / 100% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 12.5% SPECIAL NEEDS

98.6% BLACK / 1.4% WHITE

CHALLENGE

Like many other schools facing systemic challenges, Moline Elementary School's journey toward improvement began from a place of struggle. Designated as a Targeted School in Missouri and ranked among the lowest-performing in the state, by 2022 the school was under a district mandate to improve student outcomes. However, Moline lacked the foundational knowledge to effectively implement the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work[®] process, making meaningful progress difficult.

Moline serves a predominantly Black student population—learners that have been historically disadvantaged across the country—and Principal Amber White faced the daunting task of reviving a faculty used to the status quo. Professional development and district initiatives changed often, lacking a foundation in evidence-based practices. Persistent underperformance had become the norm. While the school's climate was positive, Moline's culture lacked high expectations for teaching and learning with students continuing to perform below grade level.

Following Covid, existing academic challenges at the school only deepened after being away from in-person learning for nearly a full year.

IMPLEMENTATION

During the 2022–2023 school year, Moline Elementary began its Accelerated Learning journey with the guidance of job-embedded coaching by Kristi S. Langley. While this initial year was primarily focused on professional development for teachers, a schoolwide literacy block (the first attempt at a systemic intervention) was also implemented.

A pivotal shift occurred during the summer of 2023. Amber and her guiding coalition attended a PLC at Work Institute in June, which transformed their understanding of the PLC process. This conference, coupled with ongoing support from district-level principal coach Clara Sale-Davis, provided the foundation for a more focused approach to PLC implementation.

Returning with renewed enthusiasm and a solidified vision, the team dove into *The Big Book of Tools for Collaborative Teams* by William M. Ferriter, Mike Mattos, and Rob J. Meyer, utilizing its guidance to develop school processes, documents, and collaborative structures. Adding two content coaches, Dr. Taylor B. Wenzel for English language arts (ELA) and Dr. Brian Buckhalter for math, along with new job-embedded coaching from Michael McWilliams, further strengthened the school's capacity for growth.

The 2023–2024 school year saw the implementation of learning cycle calendars in math and ELA. While grades 3–5 received specialized ELA coaching to enhance their understanding of priority standards and effective instructional strategies, K–2 concentrated on bolstering early literacy skills.

In math, a structured system for Tier 2 intervention emerged, ensuring timely assessment and support within a 10-day timeframe. Motivated by *The 15-Day Challenge* by Maria Nielsen, the guiding coalition developed a structured process for learning cycles in math, including quick checks and data trackers.

The school's commitment to continuous improvement led them to an RTI at Work[™] Institute in March 2024, further refining their approach to intervention. Amber, inspired by the conference, began utilizing *Training Teacher Leaders in a PLC at Work[®]* by Jasmine K. Kullar to guide her efforts and further develop teacher leaders.

As Moline Elementary entered its third year of implementation of Accelerated Learning in 2024–2025, the focus shifted to refining intervention systems and leading a true Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention model, which maximized resources and staggered intervention times and collaboration among teachers and support staff.

Early literacy proficiency rates jumped

216%

RESULTS

Early literacy proficiency rates: The percentage of students who struggle in early literacy has decreased from 75% to 37%, while proficiency has increased from 16.3% to 51.5%.

Reading proficiency: Students scoring Below Basic have decreased from 62.4% in 2022–2023 to 41.4% in 2024–2025, while proficiency has increased from 15.5% to 28.8%.

Math proficiency: Students scoring Below Basic have decreased from 67.1% to 51.8%, while proficiency has increased from 12.6% to 21.2%.

Student attendance: Attendance has increased by 8–10% annually since 2022–2023.

AWARDS:

- Beating the Odds ELA Award (2022–2023)
- Beating the Odds Math Award (2023–2024)
- 6th Statewide in Mathematics Growth (2023–2024)

While some teams are still progressing in their data analysis and planning, the overall shift from compliance to commitment is evident, and the school's data-driven culture is taking root. Moline Elementary is well on its way to creating a schoolwide system that provides the extra time and support needed for all students to reach high levels of learning.

- Job-embedded coaching
- PLC at Work® Institute
- District-level principal coaching
- Book study: *The Big Book of Tools for Collaborative Teams*
- Content coaching in math and ELA
- Book Study: *The 15-Day Challenge*
- RTI at Work™ Institute
- Book Study: *Training Teacher Leaders in a PLC at Work®*

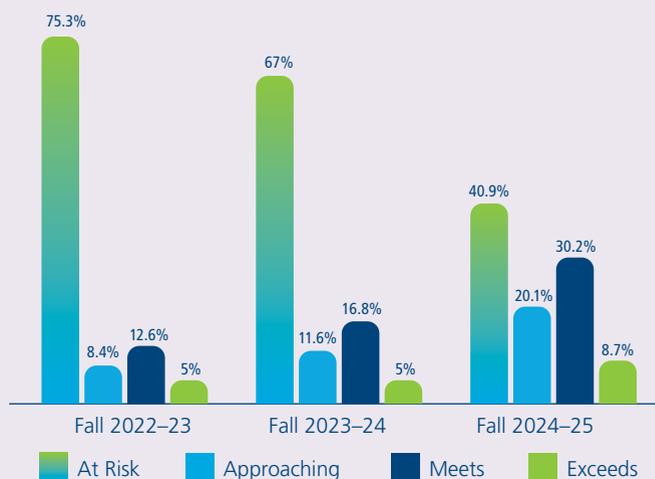


Our PLC journey truly gained momentum when we shifted to a shared vision. What began as a simple conference takeaway from our collective experience at the PLC at Work Institute became the heartbeat of our school. ‘Together, Everyone Achieves Mastery’ is more than a theme—it’s our daily commitment to collaboration, high expectations, and ensuring success for every student.

AMBER WHITE / PRINCIPAL

STAR EARLY LITERACY PROFICIENCY RATE (DISTRICT BENCHMARK)

Percent of students at or above the district benchmark on the Star Early Literacy assessment. Uses the most recent score in the given district screening window.



FEATURED EVENT AND PD



Ignite a new era of learning

JULY 20–21, 2026 | GRAPEVINE, TEXAS

The **Accelerated Learning Institute** shifts the focus from “catching up” to accelerated learning for all students, ensuring they reach and exceed grade-level proficiency. It is ideal for educators, administrators, and school leaders who seek innovative and effective strategies to address learning gaps, believe in the power of collaboration, and want a data-driven approach to instruction.

Join our expert thought-leaders and practitioners to collaboratively discover how to unlock the potential of every learner. Leave with hope and a sense of collective efficacy that shouts, **“We Got This!”**



Seats fill fast!
Register today!

SolutionTree.com/IgniteLearning



I loved the practical, ready-to-use, easily implemented strategies that came from each session. I left with lots of ideas that I can share with the districts I serve.

ASHLEY CHAMPION / TEACHER



Targeted solutions for low student achievement

Accelerated Learning professional development is designed to address low student achievement, teacher burnout, and the achievement gap and provide your school with the tools and resources needed to succeed. At Solution Tree, we understand the unique needs of underperforming schools such as those designated CSI, TSI, or ATSI. Our proven approach, based on the PLC at Work process, has been implemented in thousands of schools with remarkable results. Start building a customized plan that addresses your school’s specific challenges.



Elevate
your school

SolutionTree.com/AcceleratedPD



From labels to learning for *all*

Explore how Beyond Labels equips educators to eliminate barriers and ensure every student is seen, supported, and successful.



Too often, students are defined by the labels attached to them—labels that limit expectations and outcomes. Beyond Labels helps educators break free from deficit thinking and create schools where we see ALL students as capable of high levels of learning.

This work is grounded in the belief that every student deserves access to grade-level learning, meaningful supports, and educators who refuse to let circumstances determine potential. By committing to the principle that all means all, schools can replace limiting mindsets with a collective responsibility for every learner.

With Beyond Labels professional learning services, books, and events, educators can expect practical strategies to dismantle barriers, strengthen equity, and implement systems that guarantee success for every student—without exception.



Ready to act on a collective belief that ALL means ALL? Let's talk!

SolutionTree.com/Changemakers

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.

IN TODAY'S EVER-CHANGING
EDUCATIONAL WORLD,
CREATING INCLUSIVE SPACES
WHERE EVERY STUDENT
CAN THRIVE
IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.

By Heather Friziellie, Julie A. Schmidt, and Jeanne Spiller

With this in mind, we came up with Beyond Labels—professional learning that offers practical guidance for general and special educators

alike to bridge achievement gaps and boost learning outcomes by strengthening their expertise within professional learning communities (PLC).

How can you move Beyond Labels?

When general and special educators share responsibility, they can collaboratively create inclusive classrooms that support all students, including those with identified disabilities. This does not happen organically. It requires deliberate planning, preparation, flexibility, and intentional monitoring to ensure effective results. In other words, inclusivity in the classroom is not accidental.

A key component to ensure inclusivity is collaboratively planning lessons that accommodate diverse learning needs, integrating specialized strategies into the general curriculum. Strategies include differentiated instruction and varying service delivery models to accommodate various learning styles and abilities while maintaining alignment with academic standards, helping all students access the curriculum meaningfully. Additionally, data analysis and

ongoing communication as well as ongoing assessment and feedback are essential to determine effective communication structures to monitor student progress, discuss challenges, and adjust teaching methods as needed.

Finally, analyzing student data can allow educators to find areas where students might need more support or face greater challenges, and reflecting on instruction can help assess how effective teaching methods are in building resilience and achieving high performance.

Professional development opportunities that enhance skills in inclusive practices, instructional strategies, and behavior management are crucial to moving forward in an informed way.

What does living Beyond Labels look like?

Creating the conditions where every student thrives involves six core principles. It's important to note that these beliefs and aligned actions are not linear; rather, a system works on all of these things all the time.

However, identifying priorities and setting goals within core principles has proven to lead to more effective, long-term improvement in learning for all!

CORE BELIEFS THAT GUIDE THE **YES WE CAN!** WORK



Aligning beliefs and behaviors: All educators articulate a mindset and demonstrate through behaviors their belief that all students can learn and demonstrate proficiency on grade-

level standards. Policies, procedures, practices, and routine behaviors align with what we say we believe in.



Collaboration: All professionals in the school collaborate around meeting the needs of each and every student. Time in the daily or weekly schedule is dedicated

to collaborative learning. Regardless of the identified structure, these teams include both the general and special educators responsible for the teaching of students.



Standards-focused planning, instruction, and assessment: Essential standards and learning progressions have been identified and are used to guide instruction

and assessment at each grade level in each course for all students. Teachers collaboratively determine the criteria for assessment so that they more deeply understand the criteria for success and can design instruction so students succeed.



Tailoring instruction: Design initial grade-level instruction to keep expectations high for ALL students. Specially designing instruction for students who

struggle and those with special needs without lowering the expectations is critical. This requires teams to develop strategies for all students to access grade-level material.



Planning goals and monitoring progress: IEP goals are measurable, achievable within the annual review timeline, aligned to grade-level standards, collaboratively developed, and reflect the individual abilities and needs of the student.



Responding when students haven't yet learned: Systems are in place to support all students who struggle to learn essential content above, beyond, and before special education is considered.

How do you take the next step toward moving Beyond Labels?

By embracing the principles and actions of Beyond Labels, educators can move beyond the confines of labels and create a truly inclusive educational environment where all students, regardless of their learning needs, can thrive. Through collaboration, shared responsibility, and a focus on student-

centered practices, educators can unlock the potential of every student, fostering a sense of belonging, resilience, and academic success. Beyond Labels offers a pathway to a brighter future where all students are empowered to reach their full potential.

EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

THOMAS JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



BENTONVILLE, ARKANSAS

406 STUDENTS / 18% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 1% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 9% SPECIAL NEEDSS

81.9% WHITE / 7.1% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 6.4% MULTIRACIAL / 2.2% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 1.5% BLACK / 0.7% ASIAN / 0.2% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Although Thomas Jefferson Elementary School was in a district that followed Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work® practices, the school's interpretation and implementation of the model lacked clarity and structure when Emily Carlson began her tenure as principal in 2022. PLC meetings functioned more like unstructured team gatherings, with inconsistent agendas and minimal administrative involvement.

Principal Carlson recognized that the school's achievement scores were strong, but growth data revealed significant gaps. Students, including high achievers, were not consistently demonstrating a year's worth of academic growth. Sharing this data with the staff revealed a critical area for improvement and ignited a schoolwide commitment to focus on student growth.

Additionally, the school faced the challenge of how its third- and fourth-grade teachers taught. Before, they had different teachers for different subjects. For example, one third-grade teacher taught reading and writing, while another teacher focused on math. Principal Carlson encouraged the switch to teach all subjects to the same group of kids.

This shift required targeted support for teachers to develop confidence and competence in teaching across subjects, as well as collaborative planning practices to ensure consistency and quality of instruction.

IMPLEMENTATION

During her first year at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Principal Carlson set out to transform the school by reimagining the traditional leadership team as a guiding coalition. This new coalition focused on improving teaching and learning rather than administrative tasks. Staff members volunteered or were invited to join, ensuring a diverse and committed group to drive the school's mission forward.

To support the school's PLC development and address challenges from the first year, Principal Carlson embraced the opportunity to participate in Beyond Labels (formerly known as Yes We Can!) professional development. Beyond Labels services explore six core beliefs from the best-selling book *Yes We Can!* and specific strategies identified to grow a school site's ability to improve data for all students and collaboration by all educators.

This connected the school with Solution Tree associate Amy Moore, who played a pivotal role in helping staff refine their PLC practices.

The guiding coalition's work began with the PLC process, focusing on identifying essential standards for each unit and aligning them with SMART goals. Teams collaboratively unwrapped these standards to develop and sequence learning progressions, creating clear pathways for student mastery. Special education teachers contributed their expertise by suggesting scaffolds and supports to ensure universal access to learning. Anticipating challenges and addressing the most rigorous components of standards, teams were better equipped to meet the needs of all learners.

The collaboration was extended further by including special education teachers in grade-level planning sessions and PLC meetings. Their input helped inform lesson planning, assessment design, and student support. These teachers also adapted common formative assessments to incorporate accommodations while aligning with grade-level standards. This partnership between general and special education fostered a consistent, inclusive approach to helping all students succeed.

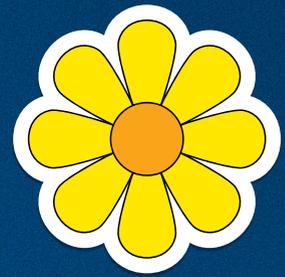
To build on this progress, the school introduced structured intervention and extension blocks into the daily schedule, dedicating time for targeted instruction in literacy and math. Instructional assistants supported small groups based on data-driven discussions, while special education teachers often included students outside their caseloads, ensuring that all students received appropriate support.

The special education team also revamped their PLC practices, shifting from compliance-focused meetings to a model aligned with grade-level teams. Guided by insights from the book *Yes We Can!*, written by Beyond Labels creators Heather Frizziellie, Julie A. Schmidt, and Jeanne Spiller, and coaching sessions with PLC expert Dr. Kristen Bordonaro, this shift emphasized student data and collaborative problem solving.

Through classroom observations, targeted feedback, and strategic planning, Principal Carlson and the administrative team reinforced a culture of collaboration and intentionality. By using student results to guide instruction and interventions, the staff united around a shared commitment: ensuring every student, regardless of their starting point, had the opportunity to succeed.



Targeted support drives growth for all students



RESULTS

Now in their second year working together as a functioning PLC at Work school following the Beyond Labels model, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School has seen significant strides in student achievement and growth. Kindergarten has consistently performed at the 99th percentile in growth and achievement, a testament to the strength of the curriculum and the dedication of the teaching staff.

However, Principal Carlson and her team have identified a consistent dip in performance when students transition from kindergarten to first grade. Addressing this challenge remains a focus as they explore strategies to bridge this gap effectively.

Second grade has shown remarkable progress in both math and literacy. **Math achievement rose from 75% to 82% within two years, while literacy improved from 81% to 90%.** These gains highlight the impact of intentional instruction, data-driven decision making, and a commitment to high standards.

The most extraordinary results have come from fourth grade. After moving away from departmentalized instruction, Principal Carlson and her team implemented Beyond Labels processes and strategies, emphasizing rigorous grade-level standards and targeted interventions.

This shift resulted in fourth-grade students reaching the 99th percentile in literacy and math growth. This success reflects the team's dedication, collaborative approach, and unwavering focus on maintaining high expectations for all students.



I am so proud of the work the teachers and students have done. I hope they feel proud too and can see the immense benefits of all those meaningful conversations—working together, revisiting ideas, and holding each other accountable to our expectations.

EMILY CARLSON / PRINCIPAL

SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN PERCENT GROWTH IN JUST ONE YEAR!

KINDERGARTEN

- 99th percentile in literacy and math growth
- Tied for first in growth across the district

GRADE 1

- 65% increase in math growth from 2023 to 2024
- 19% increase in literacy growth from 2023 to 2024

GRADE 2

- 55% increase in math growth from 2023 to 2024
- 99th percentile for literacy growth
- Tied for first in growth across the district

GRADE 3

- 30% increase in math growth from 2023 to 2024
- 44% increase in literacy growth from 2023 to 2024

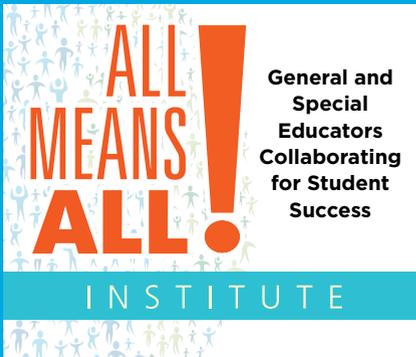
GRADE 4

- 99th percentile in literacy and math growth
- Tied for first in math growth across the district
- Highest level of literacy growth across the district

These accomplishments underscore the power of collaboration, intentionality, and a shared commitment to excellence. Under Principal Carlson's leadership, the school celebrates successes while remaining focused on continuous improvement to ensure all students reach their full potential.

- Beyond Labels PD with Amy Moore
- PLC at Work® PD with Kristen Bordonaro
- Yes We Can! book study

FEATURED EVENT AND PD



Create an inclusive culture for all

JUNE 23–25, 2026 | KISSIMMEE (ORLANDO), FLORIDA

Feeling the weight of the achievement gap and the challenge of ensuring every student has a fair chance? You're not alone. Join the All Means All Institute, which brings general and special educators together to strengthen collaboration and shared responsibility for student success. Explore research-based strategies and inclusive practices designed to support diverse learners.



Seats fill fast!
Register today!

SolutionTree.com/ExcellenceForAll



The most valuable aspect of the event was the belief in All Means All. Every student can learn and should be taught grade-level material. It is our obligation as teachers and administrators to provide students the best quality education.



From labels to learning for all

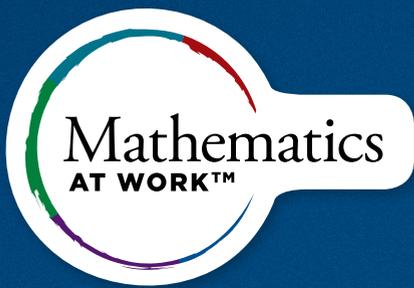
Creating an inclusive learning environment for all students, including students with special needs, should be a top concern for everyone. Beyond Labels encourages practices that lead to improved learning outcomes, increased teacher satisfaction, an inclusive school culture, and equal access to education for all students.



Explore
Beyond Labels

SolutionTree.com/SpecialNeedsExcellence





When you reflect, refine, and act, every student really can learn mathematics

Get a peek at the Mathematics at Work framework and how it improves student learning.



Mathematics at Work™ is built on the fundamental belief that every preK–12 student can learn mathematics. Participants in the Mathematics at Work professional development:

- **Gain** deeper insight into the essential mathematics team agreements and teamwork actions as part of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process
- **Reflect** on current practice using team-discussion protocols, author stories, teacher-reflection activities, and team recommendations for their daily work
- **Examine** research and use professional best-practice design criteria and routines for the design of common unit assessments, daily instruction and processes, daily homework, grading, and schoolwide Tier 1 and Tier 2 mathematics intervention
- **Design** and use effective grade band and unit-by-unit grade-level and course-based standards for appropriate sequencing and story arcs across preK–2, 3–5, 6–8, and high school



Ready to reflect, refine, and act
for better student outcomes?
Let's talk!

SolutionTree.com/Changemakers

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.

Growing powerful mathematical identities

BY MONA TONCHEFF

Fostering a learning community within the classroom is foundational to students becoming confident and successful mathematicians. As mathematics teachers, we want our students to have positive math identities and develop agency and ownership over their own learning. However, not all students enter our classes with the skills needed to engage in rich and meaningful mathematics discussions that support building strong learning identities.

When students believe they can do math (their mathematical identity), they are more likely to interact with their peers, try new strategies, persevere, and become problem solvers (exercise their agency). You must build classroom cultures that support your students' mathematical confidence and exploration.

But how do you build a culture where rich and meaningful discussions, which promote and grow students' mathematical identities, happen daily? And how do you transition from a class of individual students to a community of learners that support each other in the learning process?

Think about the best lesson you ever taught. What did it look like? How did it sound? What makes the best math lessons different from others you've taught or seen? The key characteristics of best mathematics lessons

describe a vision for teaching and learning mathematics where students:

- Feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and be heard
- See mistakes as an opportunity to learn
- Are asking each other questions
- Discuss what they are learning and how excited they are to learn more
- Have mutual respect among their peers and between themselves and the teacher
- Share a sense of purpose during the mathematical tasks and take personal responsibility for their learning

Notice how the vision described includes students learning through meaningful student-to-student discourse—a prerequisite for fostering student agency. As students listen to their peers explain their strategy or solution pathway, they have the opportunity for their own thinking to be affirmed or questioned. This deepens their understanding of the material.

To foster effective student-to-student discourse, start with the physical setup of the classroom and establish clear expectations for how students will interact and learn together during whole-group and small-group discourse. When

As an author and presenter, Mona Toncheff works with educators and leaders nationwide to build collaborative teams, empowering them with effective strategies to ensure all students receive high-quality mathematics instruction. Explore titles coauthored by Mona, like *Mathematics Assessment and Intervention in a PLC at Work*®, *Mathematics Instruction and Tasks in a PLC at Work*®, and *Mathematics Strategies for Tier 1 and Tier 2 Interventions in a PLC at Work*®.



students walk into your classroom, what do they see you value as part of the learning process?

For example, if they walk into a classroom filled with tables, they might see that you value learning that is developed through social interactions. Or if they enter a classroom where they see manipulatives or graphing calculators on the tables, they might assume you value learning that is supported with tools and concrete representations. Consider your current classroom setup and consider what is communicated to the students.

Next, to cultivate effective student-to-student discourse, clarify expectations for students as they work and learn with their peers. Most classrooms have some form of classroom norms that describe how students work as a class.

Once you and your team agree on how to organize the physical space of the classroom to communicate what you value and how to ensure expectations are clarified, modeled, and reinforced during each lesson, consider how to implement intentional instructional routines that

promote student-to-student discourse. This is where Solution Tree can help!

For example, the annual Mathematics in a PLC at Work® Summit, which will next take place November 9–11, 2026, brings together teachers from around the world. Participants will attend sessions that focus on instructional strategies and routines for making student thinking visible, promoting critical thinking, and generating opportunities for students to defend their thinking.

At professional development events like this, you and your team come away with new routines and strategies that can be implemented immediately to meet your vision for teaching and learning.



Explore more free expert content like this in our blog

[SolutionTree.com/ExpertContent](https://www.solutiontree.com/expertcontent)

EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

CHINO VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



CHINO, CALIFORNIA

25,513 STUDENTS / 51.9% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 10.3% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 12.4% SPECIAL NEEDS

54.5% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 21.4% ASIAN / 11% WHITE / 4.8% FILIPINO / 3.7% BLACK / 3.1% MULTIRACIAL / 0.3% HAWAIIAN NATIVE OR PACIFIC ISLANDER / 0.1% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE

CHALLENGE

Chino Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) initially adopted the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® process in 2008. Led by Solution Tree PLC expert Austin Buffum, who provided a foundation for the district, educators began to build the culture necessary for continuous school improvement. But despite the strong initial launch, inconsistencies across the district's 35 school sites ultimately led to a "PLC lite" approach. By 2017, teachers were expressing dissatisfaction, citing a lack of perceived value in the dedicated time.

Current Superintendent Dr. Norm Enfield recognized the need for revitalization. As a result, district leadership, including then-Assistant Superintendent Dr. Grace Park and the teachers' association leadership attended the 2017 Summit on PLC at Work in Iowa. It became clear that to drive meaningful change, CVUSD needed expert guidance and a renewed focus. With math scores lagging behind English language arts performance, particularly at the secondary level, leadership identified mathematics as a critical area for improvement, paving the way for targeted support from the Mathematics at Work™ process.

IMPLEMENTATION

In the 2017–2018 school year, CVUSD took a crucial step toward systemic improvement in mathematics instruction by collaboratively identifying 10–12 essential standards per grade level and course. This process, involving input from teachers and district leadership, aimed to establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum across all 35 school sites.

Building upon this foundation, the 2017–2018 school year marked the beginning of the district's work with author Sarah Schuhl, who introduced key Mathematics at Work practices and strategies. One cornerstone resource was her book *Mathematics Assessment and Intervention in a PLC at Work®*, coauthored with Timothy D. Kanold, Mona Toncheff, Bill Barnes, Jessica Kanold-McIntyre, Matthew R. Larson, and Georgina Rivera, which provided a framework for targeted interventions. In 2018–2019, the district began the process of establishing essential standards, which were fully implemented in 2019–2020. That same year, the district developed Essential Standards Assessments (ESAs), enabling teachers to monitor

student progress and ensure alignment with those standards throughout the year.

To enhance instructional practices, the district adopted the Math CAP framework, emphasizing conceptual understanding, application, and procedural fluency. To support this, Sarah developed an accessible online resource hub, a Padlet, filled with engagement strategies and instructional materials for teachers. Additionally, the district utilized resources such as *Mathematics Instruction and Tasks in a PLC at Work®* to improve instructional delivery.

In March 2020, as the pandemic forced school closures, the district's established essential standards and collaborative structures proved invaluable. Teachers were equipped to deliver synchronous instruction and utilize built-in intervention time, minimizing instructional disruption.

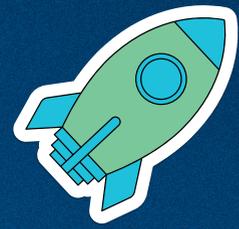
Upon returning to in-person learning in the 2021–2022 school year, the district continued its work with Sarah, focusing on proficiency maps, unit plans, and Common Formative Assessments. The district strategically utilized pandemic learning loss funds to extend the school day by 30 minutes, dedicating this time to targeted student support. Starting with secondary schools, the district gradually extended the Mathematics at Work training to lower grades.

In the 2024–2025 school year, CVUSD welcomed its seventh cohort of PLC Guiding Coalitions. Observations of teachers across the district, in all content areas, sharing PLC artifacts during structured collaboration revealed tremendous growth from the program's inception.

- The Summit on PLC at Work®
- Mathematics at Work™ PD with Sarah Schuhl
- *Mathematics Assessment and Intervention in a PLC at Work®* book study
- *Mathematics Instruction and Tasks in a PLC at Work®* book study



Teacher collaboration transforms math instruction



RESULTS

Chino Valley Unified School District’s strategic implementation of Mathematics at Work has driven consistent progress in student achievement. The district’s targeted efforts have resulted in measurable gains, demonstrating a positive trend in mathematics proficiency.

Teachers report a significant shift in classroom dynamics. They observe increased student engagement, with students actively collaborating and critically thinking to solve problems—a departure from the previous “sit-and-get” model. The district has also seen a rise in teacher collaboration, with educators sharing best practices, intervention strategies, and assessment data across school sites.

This enhanced collaboration has fostered a unified approach to instruction, ensuring consistent rigor and support for all students.

MATH PROFICIENCY GROWTH (2017–2024):

- Overall: 45% to 48.6%
- Students with special needs: 13.1% to 14.8%
- English learners: 21.5% to 25.6%
- Students from low-income households: 31.2% to 35.6%

ELA PROFICIENCY GROWTH (2017–2024):

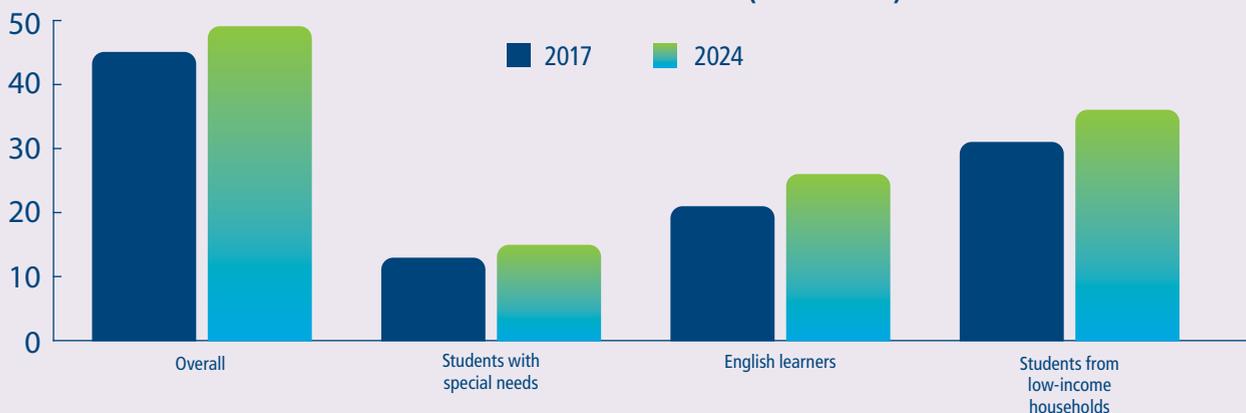
- Overall: 51% to 60.6%



It makes a real difference when you have someone who speaks the language of math teachers. Sarah Schuhl’s background allows her to connect with them on a deeper level. This builds a foundation of respect and trust because they know she’s not just knowledgeable, but truly understands their challenges.

DR. TRACY FREED / ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, INNOVATION, AND SUPPORT

MATH PROFICIENCY GROWTH (2017–2024)



EMILY GRAY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TUCSON, ARIZONA

430 STUDENTS / 21% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 3% SPECIAL NEEDS

69% WHITE / 24% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 3% MULTIRACIAL / 1% ASIAN /
1% BLACK / 1% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

Throughout her five-year 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

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.

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.



Collaboration is the key to classroom success at Emily Gray.

- Mathematics in a PLC at Work® Summit
- Mathematics at Work™ PD with Mona Toncheff

A safe space creates student mathematicians



RESULTS

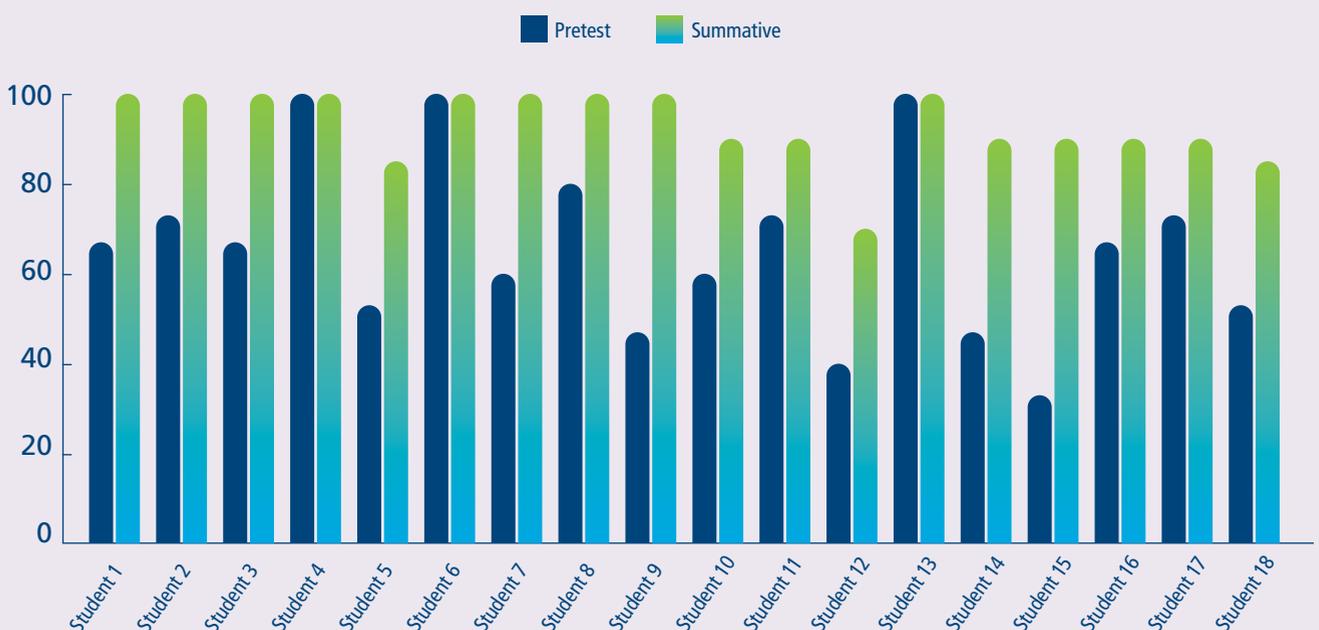
Principal Egan feels she's become a better leader since using the Mathematics at Work framework and receiving guidance from Mona. According to her, Mona's clear vision had everyone on board, and teachers continue to express their appreciation for the collaboration methods and ideas she shared.

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.

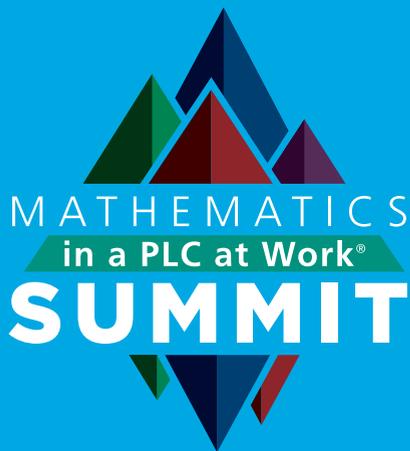
“With this learning environment we've established, the teachers feel safe to take risks and try new things, and that, in turn, allows the students to feel safe and explore. Every student now sees themselves as a mathematician.”

ELIZABETH EGAN / PRINCIPAL

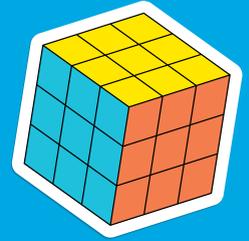
MATH 7 STUDENT TEST SCORES



FEATURED EVENT AND PD



Every student really can learn mathematics

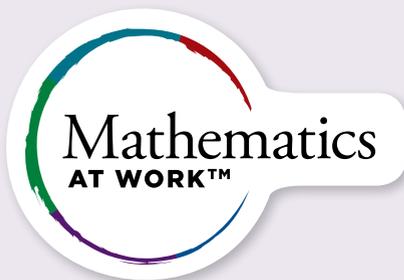


Strengthen your team's math teaching and learning at our Mathematics in a PLC at Work® Summit. Attending the summit will equip you with actionable strategies for creating cohesive mathematics instruction, improving teaching practices, and addressing achievement gaps. Become a highly effective and relational collaborative mathematics team, help students persevere in, understand, and apply mathematics every day, and walk away knowing every one of your students can learn mathematics.



Claim your seat today!

SolutionTree.com/SucceedWithMath



Every student can succeed with Mathematics at Work™

Schools and districts around the world are transforming their classrooms—now it's your turn! Bring high-quality, research-based, and fully customizable mathematics PD straight to your team. Through a practical "reflect, refine, and act" process, teachers build clarity, confidence, and consistent practices that accelerate student learning. Empower your teachers with the tools, strategies, and support they need to drive real results and make math meaningful for every student.



Ready to grow student mathematicians?

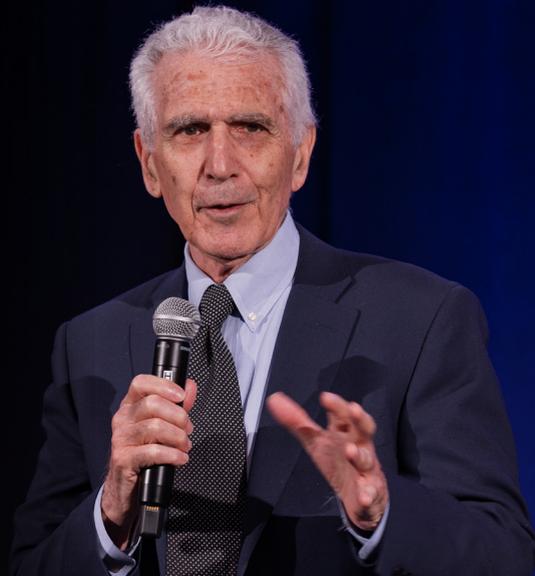
SolutionTree.com/MathAtWorkEvidence





The evidence-based pathway to real, lasting school improvement

Experience the power of aligned systems in High Reliability Schools.



The High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework helps educators move beyond isolated initiatives to create schools that operate with clarity, consistency, and confidence. Designed to fit any school or district, HRS integrates leadership, instruction, and culture, creating a powerful system for continuous improvement and sustained systemwide success.

Grounded in decades of research by Robert J. Marzano, HRS professional learning, books, and services empower teams to strengthen teaching, align practices, and monitor progress with precision. The result is a culture of collective efficacy where student learning thrives, improvement is predictable, and excellence becomes the norm.



Ready to achieve High Reliability School status? Let's talk!

MarzanoResources.com/HRSExcellence

Please note that all Evidence of Excellence stories in this catalog represent solely the timeframe in which the school or district actively implemented processes and practices set forth by Solution Tree. Building and district staff may have changed since the stories were published.

Just how valid and reliable is the High Reliability Schools framework?



BY ROBERT J. MARZANO

The High Reliability Schools (HRS) certification model was first introduced to the K–12 world of education in 2013. Since its inception, more than 800 schools have earned over 1,200 certifications across the country. As is the case with all educational models, it should be scrutinized relative to the research supporting it. Much of this research is summarized or cited in the book *5 Big Ideas for Leading High Reliability Schools* (Marzano, Acosta, and Warrick, 2024).

At its core the HRS model requires schools to determine their current status regarding five levels of school effectiveness, set growth goals in each area, and provide evidence that they have reached those goals:

- 5 Competency-Based Education
- 4 Standards-Referenced Reporting
- 3 Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
- 2 Effective Teaching in Every Classroom
- 1 Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture

As such, HRS is ostensibly a measurement process. Measurement processes are judged in terms of their reliability and validity.

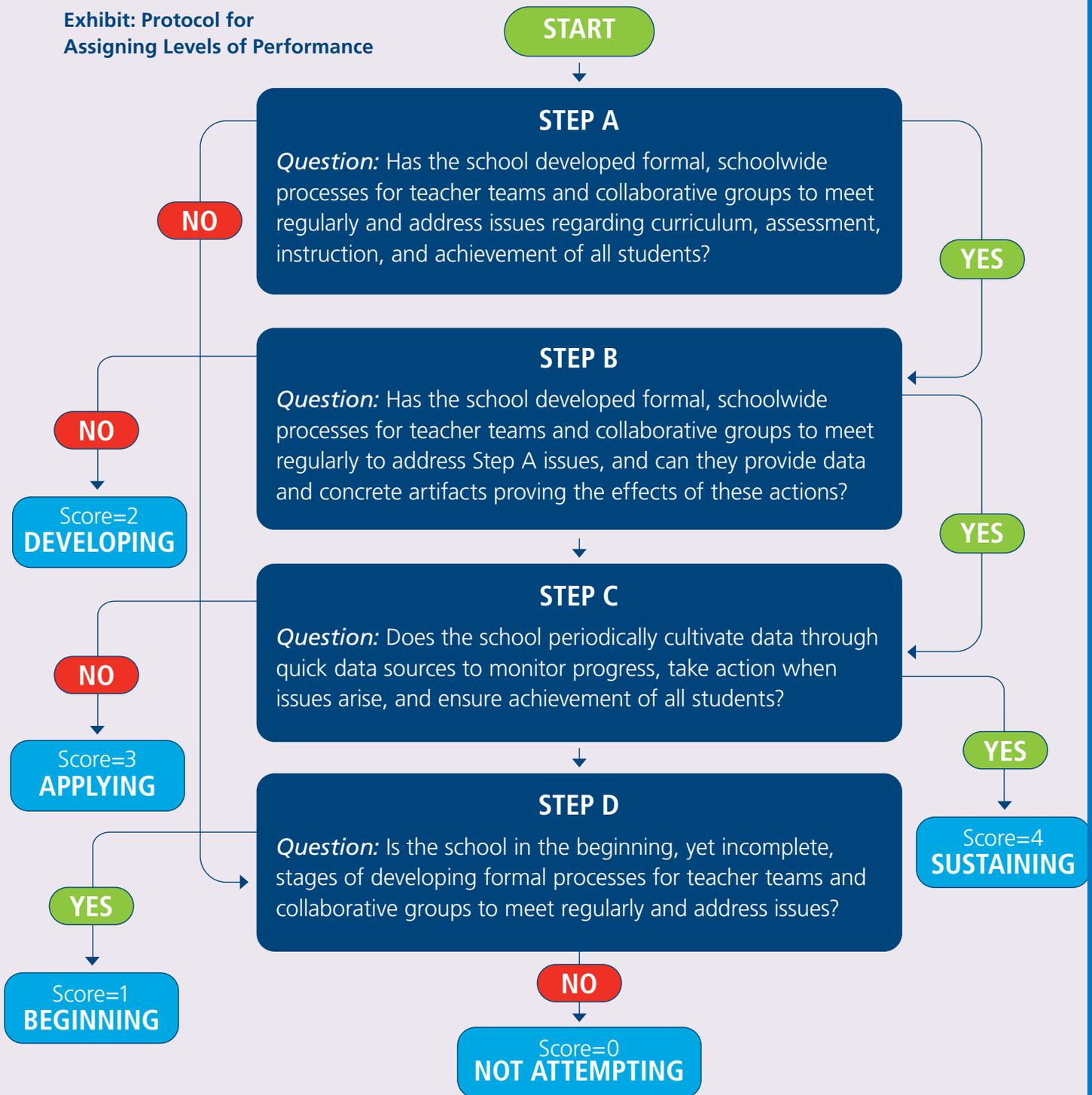
Reliability is commonly defined as how precise a measurement process is. Described in a different way, a measurement process is reliable if it mitigates the error that commonly occurs in all forms of measurement. The HRS model demonstrates this in a number of ways. First it has established high reliability coefficients (e.g., ranging from .80 to .92) for the survey data it collects. Second, it involves clear and concrete criteria for the scales that are used to rank the current status for each school involved in the certification process.

That ranking system includes the following values: not attempting, beginning, developing, applying, and sustaining. Additionally, the process for assigning a level to a school involves a rigid decision-making protocol depicted in the exhibit on the next page.

Finally, the HRS measurement process involves two levels of review before certification is granted at any level. Initially, one reviewer works with a school to help educators submit appropriate data. Once the initial reviewer judges a school to be qualified for a given level of certification, the submitted data are reviewed a second time by different members of the certification team.

Validity is commonly defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is designed to measure. At a more technical level, there are three major types of validity and the HRS framework addresses all three of them: content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity. Content validity is the extent to which the measurement instrument addresses the critical content relative to the domain being measured. In this case that domain is school effectiveness. As described in depth in the book *5 Big Ideas for Leading a High Reliability School*, the HRS model is based on a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the school effectiveness research dating back to the 1970s and continuing up through the meta-analytic research syntheses of the 2020s (e.g., Hattie, 2023). Criterion-related validity is the extent to which the measurement instrument predicts performance relative to concrete actions and behaviors in a domain. The HRS model addresses this in two ways. First, it articulates a clear logic model that shows the predicted effects of certification for each of the five levels on teachers and students, with a particular emphasis on students' performance on standardized tests. Second, the scales used to rate schools predict how well those schools will be able to provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of the various programs and practices they employ at each of the certification levels. Finally, construct validity refers to

Exhibit: Protocol for Assigning Levels of Performance



the extent to which the constructs that are the focus of the measurement instrument exist in an understandable and actionable way. In this case, those constructs are actions schools should take to become more effective at each of the five levels of the model. The fact that over 800 schools have been able to attain over 1,200 certifications represents a growing body of evidence that school leaders and classroom educators can use

the model to identify and monitor those actions and behaviors that allow them to maintain and continually increase their effectiveness

In short, the HRS certification model has research supporting its reliability and validity as a powerful and useful measurement process in the domain of school effectiveness.

References:

Hattie, J. (2023). *Visible learning: The sequel*. London and New York: Routledge.
 Marzano, R.J., Acosta, M.I., & Warrick, P.B. (2024). *5 Big Ideas for Leading a High Reliability School*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Resources.



243 STUDENTS / 61.3% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 1.7% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 23.1% SPECIAL NEEDS

88.5% WHITE / 6.6% BLACK / 3.7% MULTIRACIAL / 1.2% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE

CHALLENGE

Bankhead Middle School is a traditionally high-performing school, with reading and math scores that rank above district and state averages. Never satisfied with status quo, Principal Amber Freeman and her team at Bankhead continue to seek ways to not only maintain their strong results, but also to improve and ensure that every student shares the school’s success.

When district leaders brought the High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework to her attention, Freeman recognized its potential to support and structure her school’s initiatives. HRS Level 1, which focuses on a safe, supportive, and collaborative culture, was especially impactful at the middle school level, where students undergo significant social, physical, and academic changes in a short span of time.

Bankhead’s faculty and staff sought to assist students most at risk—those facing challenges with behavior, home life, or attendance that impacted their academic performance. Believing these students would benefit from more individualized support and personal connections, they designed and implemented a teacher-student mentoring program.

Bankhead’s leaders also aimed to improve the instructional capacity of their teachers. HRS Level 2 emphasizes effective teaching in every classroom. To ensure consistency and a common understanding of instructional practices and expectations, Bankhead focused on developing and mastering their own instructional model.

IMPLEMENTATION

Bankhead educators customized their mentorship program and instructional model to fit their unique needs rather than using out-of-the-box solutions. Grounded in research, the HRS framework supports this adaptive approach and

emphasizes continuous monitoring and improvement—practices that Bankhead leaders have also adopted.

The school’s mentorship program, “Boosting Motivation and Success” (BMS), began informally and evolved by adapting data-driven models to fit students’ needs. Students with discipline or home life challenges who are not already receiving other services are referred by teachers, and mentors choose their mentees. Mentors meet weekly with one or two students, focusing on patience, positivity, and high expectations to foster positive relationships that motivate improved behavior, attendance, and academics. The program continues to be refined to maximize mentor impact, including shifting attendance-related support to the school counselor.

For instruction, Bankhead adapted 16 elements from Dr. Robert Marzano’s New Art and Science of Teaching (NASOT) model, aligning them with the state teacher evaluation system. Teachers take ownership by mastering and presenting elements. Their work is supported by Avanti, a library of professional learning videos made by teachers for teachers, as well as further professional development from Marzano Resources associates. Individual growth goals, Avanti’s virtual platform, collaborative learning rounds, and scheduled collaboration time helped teachers improve their skills and collectively ensure student success.

- High Reliability Schools framework
- 16 elements from Dr. Robert Marzano’s New Art and Science of Teaching
- PD via Avanti
- PD with Marzano associates

Chronic absenteeism drops to 4.9%

RESULTS

While Bankhead leaders recognized their initiatives were making a positive difference, they sought to quantify these impacts more precisely, as encouraged by the HRS certification process. “We had the realization that we needed to put some numbers to it,” Freeman said.

For the mentorship program, data was collected on discipline, academic achievement, and attendance. Since the 2021–2022 school year, 96% of participating students experienced growth in at least one area, and 76% improved in two or more areas. Academic improvement was the most significant, with 77% of mentees raising their letter grades in at least one subject.

To monitor implementation of their instructional model, Bankhead tracked the use of model elements during classroom walkthroughs. By 2025, all elements were observed schoolwide, with teachers demonstrating steady progress.

These improvements in student support and instruction contributed to gains in state accountability measures and student achievement. Chronic absenteeism dropped from 17.2% in 2022 to 4.9% in 2024—well below the Alabama state average of 14.8%. Among the cohort of students

who completed 5th through 8th grade at Bankhead from 2021 to 2024, proficiency on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) increased from 43.1% to 66.7% in English language arts and from 34.7% to 36.6% in math.

Implementing, monitoring, and refining initiatives within the context of the HRS framework has allowed Bankhead Middle School to maintain and improve high standards for the students they serve. “We feel like proud parents,” Freeman said.

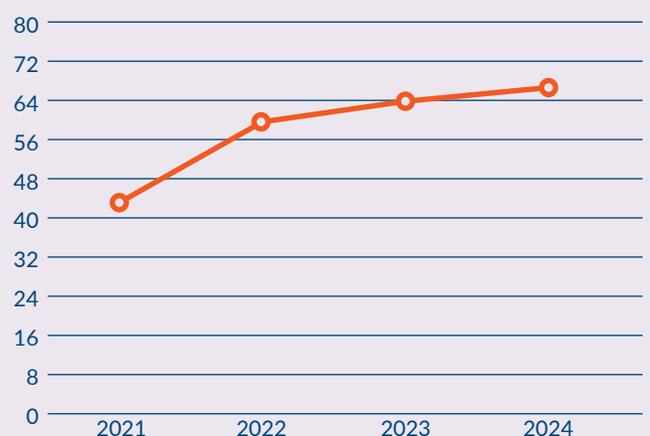
“
We feel like
proud parents.”

AMBER FREEMAN / PRINCIPAL

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT BANKHEAD MIDDLE SCHOOL



ELA PROFICIENCY AT BANKHEAD MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADE LEVEL COHORT)





12,860 STUDENTS / 25.5% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 10% SPECIAL NEEDS

49.6% WHITE / 40.8% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 5.01% MULTIRACIAL / <2% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / <2% ASIAN / <2% BLACK / <2% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

CHALLENGE

At the beginning of 2022, Marana Unified School District was hard at work balancing numerous initiatives to continuously improve student outcomes. But according to Kristin Reidy, the district’s assistant superintendent, while Marana’s schools already had strong, long-lasting programs and practices in place, many were being operated in disparate ways. Additionally, schools did not always receive equitable support and resources, limiting both individual school and districtwide efficiency and consistency. “We didn’t need a ton of new [programs],” Kristin explained. “We needed alignment to get everything moving.”

But moving from a highly autonomous collection of schools to a unified and collaborative network would require a cultural shift across the district. To coordinate this transformation, Marana turned to Marzano Resources’ High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework. District leadership committed to having every school eventually attain certifications at HRS Levels 1, 2, and 3. Setting this multilevel certification goal at the beginning of the work communicated to school leaders and staff that HRS would not be a transitory initiative but a long-term process of systemic change.

Later that year, schools began administering HRS surveys to assess strengths and identify areas for growth at Level 1 of the framework. The improvement and certification efforts officially launched in the summer of 2023.

IMPLEMENTATION

Marana schools adopted new operational structures to implement initiatives and address issues. “We leveraged the collaborative team as the engine at the school sites,” Kristin explained.

For example, the district had identified elementary literacy as a priority and created a literacy task force

that recommended a new reading curriculum. Each school created collaborative teams focused on literacy to facilitate this curricular change and improve literacy instruction. Kristin explained that while changes like a new curriculum often cause a short-term dip in performance as teachers and students adjust, the support from the HRS structures helped Marana avoid this drop-off.

As the district worked toward Level 1 certification, they began planning for Level 2, which emphasized effective teaching. According to Kristin, work at Level 2 allowed teachers to become reacquainted with the model of instruction. Administrators and teachers spent an entire year reviewing the model. For the first time, every teacher had an instructional growth goal tied to the district model, allowing for continuous improvement in instructional practice and the alignment of professional learning opportunities to teachers’ individual goals.

The HRS framework also ensured continuity during leadership changes. In 2024, the district had four new principals and five new assistant principals, including three positions filled by internal candidates. The common language and expectations around HRS enabled leaders to quickly adjust to their new roles, ensuring smooth and consistent operations across their schools.

“Support must precede accountability,” Kristin emphasized, making sure that Marana schools received consistent district support, such as instructional coaches, to meet high standards. “HRS has helped us organize and systemize our work,” she said.

- High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework
- Attain certification at HRS Levels 1, 2, and 3

Districtwide commitment to HRS drives systemic change

RESULTS

This structured approach has contributed to districtwide success in both individual initiatives and overall school performance. The entire district has achieved Level 1 certification and continues to deepen its understanding and implementation of HRS. Every school is actively working on Levels 2 and 3, with several having already achieved certification at Level 2.

The emphasis on improving elementary literacy, supported by a new curriculum, collaborative teams, and enhanced instruction, has led to year-over-year increases in the percentage of K–3 students reading above grade level.

State accountability grades for Marana schools have also improved since the district began working with the HRS framework. Of the district’s 17 schools, 13 received an A or B rating from the state of Arizona in 2022 (prior to the introduction of HRS), while 15 earned an A or B in 2024. This improvement included an increase from six A-rated schools in 2022 to 10 in 2024.

Adopting the HRS framework across the district has allowed every school to share the benefits of improvements in culture, instruction, and curriculum within the first three levels while also aligning expectations and operations.

As Kristin explained, “HRS provided the framework for us to engage in systemic change.”

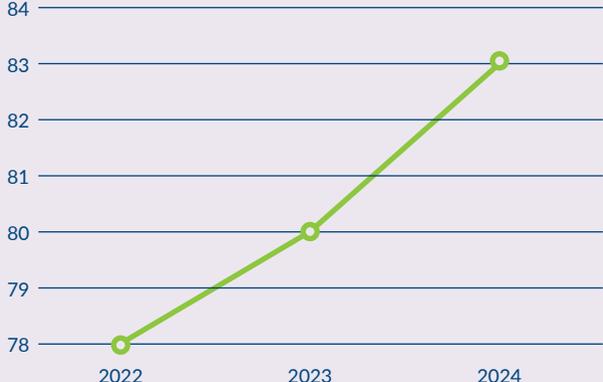
“Support must precede accountability . . . HRS has helped us organize and systemize our work.”

KRISTIN REIDY / ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

PERCENT OF MUSD ELEMENTARY STUDENTS READING AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL FOR COHORTS (2022–2023)



MUSD STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PERCENTAGE POINTS EARNED (DISTRICT AVERAGE)



99,354 STUDENTS / 74.5% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 17.5% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 11.5% SPECIAL NEEDS

46.9% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 34.5% WHITE / 13.6% BLACK / 3.2% MULTIRACIAL /
1.6% ASIAN / 0.1% NATIVE AMERICAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

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 feedback on 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.

All ten 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.

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.

-  High Reliability Schools framework
-  High Reliability Schools Coaching Academy
-  New Art and Science of Teaching

Staff satisfaction with professional learning reaches

94%

RESULTS

In total, 32 schools in the Lee County School District received a Level 1 HRS certification, and 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 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.

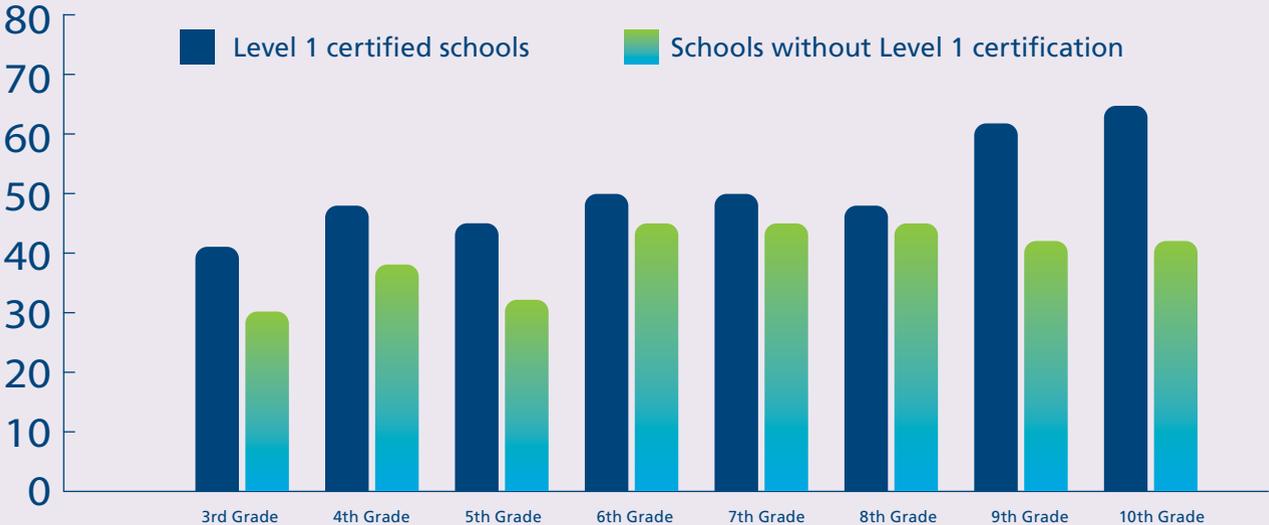
As far as return on investment, staff surveys indicate educators in Lee County value their work with HRS. In year 1 of implementation, 93% agree and strongly agree that the content presented will enhance work performance. In year 5 of implementation, 94% of staff surveyed agree and strongly agree that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



Through the ESSER grant, Lee has created a sustainable pathway for leaders and . . . 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, EdD / DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ELA STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA, GRADES 3–10





5,108 STUDENTS / 65% FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH / 24% ENGLISH LEARNERS / 10% SPECIAL NEEDS

**70% WHITE / 25% HISPANIC OR LATINO / 10% BLACK / 10% NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER /
3.7% AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE / 2.2% MULTIRACIAL**

CHALLENGE

Ottumwa Community School District faced significant challenges in 2021. Their schools were plagued by inconsistencies, and from building to building, approaches to behavior, interventions, and even data analysis varied wildly. This lack of uniformity made it challenging to establish consistent practices and build strong collaborative relationships.

As a result, a frustrating cycle of minimal progress and stagnant proficiency rates occurred, leaving students underserved and teachers struggling to meet their diverse needs. Families were increasingly choosing other districts, and a sense of complacency threatened to undermine any hope for real improvement.

Ottumwa knew they needed a change—a framework to guide their efforts, serve as a catalyst for transformation, and pave the way for a more equitable and effective learning environment for all students. That’s when Maria Lantz, the district’s director of curriculum and instruction, stepped in, utilizing Marzano Resources’ High Reliability Schools (HRS) and the New Art and Science of Teaching (NASOT).

IMPLEMENTATION

Ottumwa’s journey toward becoming a mastery-based district, under the leadership of superintendent Michael McGrory, associate superintendent Brad McCloskey, and Maria Lantz, was deliberate and strategic. The district recognized the importance of building relationships and establishing baseline standards to ensure everyone was on the same page, adopting a “go slow to go fast” approach. This commitment to growth began in the summer of 2022, when the first group of Ottumwa staff attended an HRS Institute in Des Moines, Iowa.

The first year (2022–2023) of Ottumwa’s journey focused on building a foundational understanding of HRS and NASOT. The district leadership team engaged in a book study of *A Handbook for High Reliability Schools* by Robert J. Marzano, Philip B. Warrick, and Julia A. Simms, and *The New Art and Science of Teaching* by Robert J. Marzano.

The district then concentrated on one key instructional element from NASOT: element 32, “motivating and inspiring students.” Individual buildings were also given the option to select another element to focus on, and many chose element 33, “establishing rules and procedures.” This building-level focus highlighted existing inconsistencies in foundational practices and the need for greater clarity around leading indicators. During the school year, Marzano Resources associate Dr. Tina H. Boogren began conducting pre-service training with new teachers and mentors. Additionally, staff attended an instructional coaching workshop with Dr. Philip B. Warrick, and Jan K. Hoegh helped lead the implementation of HRS and NASOT in the district’s secondary buildings.

Midway through the 2022–2023 school year, the leadership team recognized that while NASOT provided the “how,” they still needed a clearer understanding of the leading indicators. During the summer of 2023, Marzano associate and author Dr. Mike Ruyle worked directly with the leadership team at Ottumwa to help create the district’s instructional vision, which clearly outlined the leading indicators that would be monitored at both HRS Levels 1 and 2, providing a much-needed framework and clarity for everyone involved.

While ongoing consultations with Drs. Ruyle and Boogren continued, Marzano associate and school improvement expert Kathy Cawthron worked with Wilson Elementary School on developing scales and rubrics.

With an instructional vision in place, the district entered its third year (2024–2025) of implementation and refinement. This year emphasized continued school improvement, including developing clear expectations, defining whose voices are included in the process, establishing monitoring systems, celebrating successes, and providing reteaching and reinforcement when needed. A draft framework for Tier 1 social-emotional behavior health was also developed, outlining the essential components that every building should have in place.

In the summer of 2024, Ottumwa’s staff attended an HRS Institute and the Marzano Mastery Approaches Institute.

HRS ends the cycle of minimal progress



RESULTS

The initial year of exploration with HRS and NASOT fostered a greater willingness among staff, particularly administrators, to embrace the systems-level work. This shift in mindsets paved the way for deeper engagement and a shared focus on what's best for students. Despite the challenges, the district saw a surge in intrinsic motivation among staff to embrace this work.

This positive momentum, coupled with the introduction of systematic monitoring, has yielded tangible results.

- Behavior incidents decreased significantly, from a high of 208 negative incidents in 2022–2023 to just 60 in the 2024–2025 school year.
- Chronic Absenteeism went from 25.44% in 2023–2024 to 17.32% in 2024–2025
- The number of eighth-graders earning Bs increased substantially—from 311 students in 2023–2024 to 544 in 2024–2025, representing an increase of 233 students.



I truly believe our progress this year, which has been incredible, would be significantly slower without the support from Marzano Resources. Their entire team, including Mike Ruyle and the other associates, has been absolutely essential in helping us achieve the positive momentum we're seeing.

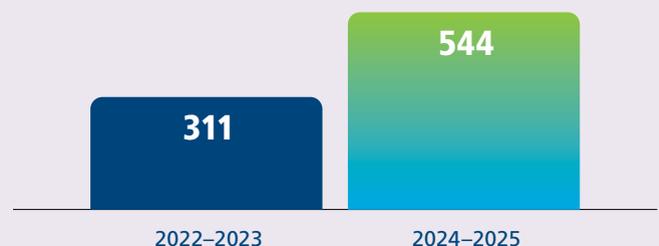
MARIA LANTZ / DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- High Reliability Schools Institute
- Book studies: *A Handbook for High Reliability Schools* and *The New Art and Science of Teaching*
- On-site PD
- Improving Teacher Development Through Instructional Coaching Workshop
- High Reliability Schools Institute
- Marzano Mastery Approaches Institute

BEHAVIOR INCIDENTS



NUMBER OF EIGHTH-GRADERS EARNING Bs



FEATURED EVENT

HRS
High
Reliability
Schools

I N S T I T U T E

Reach new levels of student achievement

Join our team of nationally acclaimed experts at a High Reliability Schools (HRS) Institute, where you'll gain the knowledge and tools to implement the powerful HRS framework in your school or district.



Ready to claim your seats?
Register today!

MarzanoResources.com/LevelUp26

- **LEARN** how the HRS framework organizes research-based practices that increase student achievement.
- **DISCOVER** how establishing a common model of instructional practice can improve teaching and learning in every classroom.
- **ACQUIRE** a process for establishing a guaranteed and viable curriculum districtwide to ensure all students learn.
- **UNDERSTAND** how to use quick data to monitor and sustain successful practices within schools.



MARZANO Resources

FEATURED DIGITAL TOOLS

Choose smarter PD tools for stronger schools



Avanti is an on-demand professional learning platform that delivers ready-to-use strategies when teachers need them most. With proven approaches to boost engagement, improve behavior, and close learning gaps, educators can strengthen instruction in their classroom and drive student success.

KEY FEATURES

- Self-paced, job-embedded professional learning
- Short, actionable strategy-based videos and content
- Coverage across reading, math, science, AI and more
- AI-powered assistant for deeper learning and support

Who's it for: Individual teachers, school and district leaders, instructional coaches, and teacher teams looking for support to strengthen teaching and learning



Global PD Teams helps schools build collaboration, sustain initiatives, and achieve lasting results. With expert-led resources and built-in collaboration tools, this learning platform keeps teams aligned, accountable, and focused on what matters most: student learning.

KEY FEATURES

- Structured learning pathways in eight essential areas
- Expert-led resources: videos, ebooks, mini courses
- Collaboration and progress-tracking tools
- Implementation guides for schoolwide professional development

Who's it for: PLCs, teacher teams, school and district leaders focused on continuous improvement and looking to scale PD systemwide

Bundle and save 10%

Bring together team-focused professional learning with personalized instructional strategies for a comprehensive PD experience. The combined power of Global PD Teams and Avanti ensures that **both teachers and leaders** have the tools they need to drive meaningful learning outcomes.

Receive a 10% discount when you purchase Avanti and Global PD Teams together for new or renewal accounts.



Try the Ed-Tech Bundle today!

SolutionTree.com/Bundle10



Solution Tree

Your plan for proven results starts here



Ready to create your own success story?
Let's talk!

SolutionTree.com/Changemakers



Like the educators featured in this catalog, you and your staff can discover what it's like to be fully supported every step of the way in your work to make a difference for every student.

We know the challenges are real, but so is your impact. Together, we can develop the processes, skills, and confidence to create positive change that is scalable and sustainable. Contact us today to make a plan.



LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER