

Honeoye Falls-Lima High School *Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District*

School Context

Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District, located in Monroe, Livingston, and Ontario Counties, is a blend of rural, suburban and small town populations. The district serves approximately 2700 students divided among a primary, intermediate, middle, and high school. Both the teachers and administrators interviewed agree that the community takes great pride in its school district, “the centerpiece of the community.” The community supports and is an active partner in the district’s mission of “producing graduates who value themselves and others, attain their highest level of achievement, contribute to the community, and succeed in a changing world.” The themes of the district mission statement were echoed by faculty and administration throughout the visit.

In 2007, the New York State Education Department named Honeoye Falls-Lima a “high performing/gap closing school district” for the third consecutive year. In addition, *Newsweek* magazine rates the district in the top 1.3% of schools in the nation. Even with these accolades, the superintendent stresses a culture of “continuous improvement.” She explains that it is important to use data to inform decision making, to reflect on programs, to make corrections and to “never be satisfied.”

Student Demographics 2005-6: *Honeoye Falls-Lima HS, Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District*

	Honeoye Falls – Lima High School	Honeoye Falls - Lima CSD	New York State
% Eligible for Free Lunch	5%	5%	37%
% Eligible for Reduced Lunch	2%	3%	8%
% Limited English Proficient	0%	0%	N/A
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% African-American	0%	1%	20%
% Hispanic/Latino	1%	1%	20%
% White	97%	96%	53%
% Other	2%	2%	7%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level English Assessments	94%	90%	69%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level Mathematics Assessments	93%	88%	71%
% Students Graduating	93%	90%	67%
Total Enrollment	840	2,541	2,772,669

A welcoming climate is evident to anyone entering the High School, which is located in the picturesque town of Honeoye Falls. The overall atmosphere is calm and orderly: seniors enjoy the privilege of meeting quietly in the cafeteria instead of attending an assigned study hall; students actively engage in a variety of activities in the library; athletes leave their oversized equipment bags near the school entrance; and students and teachers interact in a friendly pleasant way.

Best Practices Highlights

Honeoye Falls-Lima High School is characterized by

- A well-articulated educational philosophy based on district Strategic Goals and Intents;
- A culture of high expectations and challenging academic courses for all students; and
- A student centered, highly engaged staff supported by effective professional development.

These characteristics are evident across five broad themes that frame the best practices study of which this case is one partⁱⁱ. The sections that follow discuss specific practices at Honeoye Falls-Lima High School within each theme.

A Closer Look

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Academic Goals: Strategic Planning and Strategic Intents

The district's Strategic Plan is integrally connected to its vision and mission. It states the core beliefs and commitment of the school and community to its students and educators. Almost everyone interviewed referred to the Strategic Plan and Strategic Intents when asked about the high school's academic goals.

The district's mission states, "The Honeoye Falls-Lima School Community is committed to producing graduates who succeed in a changing world, as reflected by our district exit level standards." According to the exit standards, "students will demonstrate the following attributes:"

- Effective Communicator
- Responsible Member of Society
- Respectful of Self and Others
- Lifelong, Self-directed Learner
- Creative, Critical Thinker
- Quality Producer.

The teachers interviewed appear to take the district Strategic Plan's vision, mission and commitments very seriously. The mission and exit standards are evident when teachers describe student success and school priorities:

We want life long learners, we want them well rounded...linguistically and scientifically literate.

Students should be effective communicators and intrinsically motivated to seek out knowledge in a life-long way. They should give back to the community, even the global community...[be] culturally aware and educationally motivated.

We try to get the kids exposed to diversity.

Some intents have to do with building assets for youth, reducing risky behaviors and increasing healthy practices.

The district commitments lead directly to the Strategic Intents. For example, a program commitment states, “We are committed to increase student participation in and mastery of skill development in languages, mathematics, sciences and arts.” From that commitment a Strategic Intent is identified:

*Participation in Mathematics and Science Instruction: By 2012, 75% of all High School graduates will receive credit in four mathematics courses and four science courses.
Sub-Intent: By June 2012, 70% of all High School students will demonstrate mastery in their mathematics and science courses.*

Clearly the school district has high expectations for all its students.

The Strategic Plan appears to be the driving force when setting academic goals. The superintendent reports that the district develops academic goals “through strategic planning and the school improvement process at the building level. The process starts with a big vision and gets more and more specific...there’s broad involvement to get to that level.” Another administrator explains, “Student achievement drives our decisions.” Those interviewed describe a concerted effort to make the Strategic Plan, program evaluation model, budget goals, and school goals all interrelated.

The committees involved in the process are thoroughly explained in the Honeoye Falls-Lima School District Information Booklet available on the district website. They follow the QED—Quality Education Design—a way of “maintaining quality learning opportunities by tying available dollars directly to program.” The Teaching and Learning Council (TLC), School Improvement Team (SIT) and Decision Input Units (DIU) all factor into setting the academic goals for the district and each school. The membership of each group is evidence that all stakeholders are involved in the process. TLC members include principals, the assistant superintendent, CARE—Curriculum Articulation Resource Educator—representatives, curriculum coordinators, parent representatives, a member of the board of education, a special area representative, and the academically talented coordinator. Each building has a SIT comprised of administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, students, and community members. The DIUs are organized by department in the high school and “provide the opportunity for inclusive decision making by those most affected by the decisions.” It is clear that setting and achieving academic goals through inclusive teamwork and vision is a top priority.

Curriculum

Honeoye Falls-Lima educators see New York State Standards as providing the framework for curriculum. Each department has a curriculum map that teachers developed and is “updated constantly.” A teacher says, “The standards drive the curriculum maps. The curriculum maps provide a scaffold and articulation of standards into practice.”

Other teachers say,

The curriculum maps and writing are aligned with the state standards.

We have autonomy about how we teach, but the topics, time frame and common vocabulary are in the curriculum map.

They are very helpful to new teachers as a guide to follow.

Everyone interviewed confirms the benefits of curriculum mapping. Central office administrators report creating a “year at a glance” document for each of the curriculum maps. It is an overview of the curriculum that parents can access online. They describe curriculum work as collaborative and an “ongoing conversation.”

There appears to be a culture of challenging students and maintaining high standards: “We are following the standards and exceeding them,” reports one teacher. Both teachers and administrators express pride in the number of AP courses offered: “We want students to take challenging classes and then if they need support, they get it.” The Strategic Plan’s Intents focus on moving more students toward mastery in all subjects.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Supportive Leadership

The superintendent reports strong, supportive leadership throughout the district. She characterizes the board of education as “mature, responsible and reflective. They don’t micromanage and are very respectful of the role of professionals.” The administration and board of education attend a summer retreat where they look at the data and assess how the district is meeting its goals.

She describes the teachers’ association as “solution oriented” and reports a “good partnership with them.” She describes the association as a full partner in planning professional development, and members serve an active role on the Teacher and Learning and Technology Councils. She meets with association officers monthly and asserts there is “an open relationship with a lot of communication.”

The assistant superintendent works closely with the curriculum coordinator, who works closely with the CARE reps (Curriculum Articulation Resource Educators—similar to department chairs) and teachers. An administrator states, “We work in an open inquiry framework. You cannot do this on your own.” A responsive, supportive leadership that seeks input from all stakeholders is evident in the Honeoye Falls-Lima School District.

New Administration

The superintendent has been with the district for two years, and the principal and both assistant principals are new to the high school this year. Some teachers express concerns that the new administration may make changes for change sake. The principal, however, explains that every school has unique needs. He believes in assessing the needs of the school and community before making changes: “Look, measure, then jump.”

Staff Selection

The principal reports the process for hiring new teachers is evolving. The district is moving toward recruitment “rather than just hiring to fill a spot.” They have developed a teacher profile with a uniform checklist to be used at teacher fairs and uniform protocols for interviews. The administration is confident the school district is attracting top candidates. “We are a very good school system; it draws people with experience.” Another administrator states, “People are attracted to work here because of supportive leadership and board of education.” The teachers interviewed agree that the school is a positive place to work but are concerned that teacher salaries are low when compared to area schools. They fear it may impact the recruitment of top teachers.

New Teacher Mentor Program

All the teachers interviewed cite the mentor program as very helpful to new teachers. Mentors meet with new teachers weekly to discuss all aspects of teaching, from curriculum to classroom management to school procedures. Both mentors and mentees keep journals and logs and observe each other. A summer orientation is part of the mentor program for the first year, and the mentoring continues until the new teacher is tenured. The CARE Reps “adopt them [new teachers in their department] informally.”

Professional Development

The administrators and teachers interviewed agree that professional development opportunities are outstanding and a priority. There are continuous professional development offerings—after school throughout the school year and during summers. A district administrator reports that faculty and department meetings are used for staff development, “These meetings are not administrative; they are more staff development meetings.”

Teachers are also encouraged to go to professional conferences. District surveys help determine professional development needs, as do the curriculum coordinators and CARE reps. TIP—Teacher Initiated Proposals—is another avenue to staff development. For example, teachers may participate in a book study group or request specialized technology training or time to work on a common assessment.

Teachers say,

There’s good staff development with a lot of offerings.

[Professional development] trains teachers in technology for 21st-century skills, literacy skills, and instruction strategies to keep teachers current.

Through professional development we trained math teachers in tablet use....Teachers can get 40-50 hours of professional development a year.

Teachers have a say in what we need. We brought in local colleges to talk to teachers about the kind of writing needed in college. It's very empowering for the staff to be part of their own professional development.

Collaboration

Collaboration occurs both formally and informally at Honeoye Falls-Lima High School: “We interact on a daily basis.” Monthly department meetings are repeatedly cited as a time for colleagues to share strategies, materials, student work and assessments. It is also a time to write curriculum. “We work in a warm environment with no tension...we work so collaboratively that it is inherent in who we are.”

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

School-wide Initiatives

Several school-wide initiatives are in place at the high school: literacy instruction in all content areas, a district-wide writing program, and integrating 21st-century technology into instruction. The superintendent asserts, “Every teacher is expected to be a literacy teacher. The literacy initiative has increased achievement across content areas.” Teachers also acknowledge a push to embed diversity instruction in lessons, to differentiate instruction, and to use inquiry based instruction.

Another administrator explains that the instructional programs come out of student assessments, Strategic Intents, and the desire for continuous improvement. She asserts programs are not randomly selected, and the district is not “packaged program driven.” She also states, “The text book is the resource not the course.”

Instructional resources are readily available to teachers. One administrator says, “Teachers get most anything they need...if they don't have what they need, they haven't asked.” Another believes the unique budgeting process (with the departmental Decision Input Units) “taps into the rank and file while keeping the over-arching goal in mind.”

School Schedule

The consensus among the teachers interviewed is that their unique modified block schedule benefits instruction. On Monday there are eight periods of 40 minutes each. The Tuesday through Friday schedule consists of six periods of 53-minute blocks. According to one teacher, “It gives us enough time for getting into depth -- like intense discussion -- without losing the students' attention span.” Another unique feature of the schedule is an extra five minutes built into mid-morning. It's like a short recess when students can have a snack, use the rest rooms, or connect with a teacher.

Student-Centered Instruction

It is obvious that students are at the center of all decisions made at Honeoye Falls-Lima. When asked about high quality teaching, one educator characterizes it as “learner focused and learning focused.” The need for connections to the students and an engaging classroom environment is a refrain voiced by many. Genuine warmth and caring about students is also evident.

Teachers say,

We want strong relationships with students and want kids to be well rounded...happy while learning content.

Students lie at the center and must be kept in mind. Great classes are geared toward the students as the center of things.

As teachers, success is not just the standardized tests, it's how we relate to the kids and how we teach life lessons.

Always put student needs first; this district does this.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

According to the superintendent, using data to inform decision making and instruction is extremely important to the district. Departmental analysis of state assessment results, mid-terms, and final exams occur routinely. Using state assessments for data analysis at the Teaching and Learning Council meetings is another way data are used to inform instruction.

The Program Evaluation Cycle occurs every four years and influences all curriculum projects. An administrator characterizes the evaluation cycle, which starts in July of one year and ends in November of the following year, as an “opportunity to step back and reflect on what is successful and what needs to be done to improve. It is a lot of work but so much better than a checklist.” A yearly school-wide student survey and an exit interview with graduates provide feedback on high school experiences, concerns, and recommendations. For example, because of student input, a psychology class will be scheduled next year.

The Risky Behavior Task Force is using data from an at-risk behavior survey to address concerns about alcohol and drug use among high school students. The principal says the school does not have unique problems, but the district is not ignoring the problems revealed in the survey. An expert on substance abuse spoke to the student body and challenged the school to continue to work on alcohol and drug issues.

Teachers and administrators agree that monitoring student progress is a daily responsibility. Teachers use homework, quizzes, unit tests, labs, speaking, writing, discussions and other “multiple indicators.” An online program helps keep track of student grades and progress. Parents are informed of their child’s progress with five week reports and report cards every ten weeks. Some teachers express a concern about overly involved ‘helicopter parents’ who sometimes defend their children instead of recognizing problems and working with the district to

solve them. The consensus is parents and educators need to be partners. As one teacher states, “Parents are essential. Parents who value education are the most important thing. They are part of a collaborative team working toward a goal. We’re not against each other.”

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

Recognizing Achievement

Academic achievement is recognized in traditional ways: Honor Roll, Awards Night, and National Honor Society. Other accomplishments are celebrated on morning announcements, in the school newsletter, and on the district website. Students are also encouraged to compete in area art shows, music festivals, and as members of the robotics team and math club. An educator involved with the Academically Talented Program cites many after school programs that lead students to varied experiences and accomplishments. He advises the Youth Court, where youthful offenders are tried before a court of their peers. Several members of Model UN have visited South Africa. The Socrates Café meets once a month as an open forum where students discuss issues of their own choosing. These activities are open to all students, not just those designated as ‘academically talented’: “We work doggedly to get under-achievers involved in after school activities.”

Any teacher in the school district cited as an influential teacher by a student during the exit interview receives a letter from the guidance department recognizing the teacher’s positive impact on students’ educational lives.

Academic Intervention for Struggling Students

The special education program is described as a “very inclusive model” that provides a continuum of services. A supportive interaction between faculty and students and the utilization of very capable para-professional staff are reported. Collaboration with administrators, teachers and parents is also cited as important. A district administrator says, “Parents are at the table at the first sign of a problem. We build a collaborative mind set from the beginning.”

The success of many special education students is partially attributed to minimal segregation of special education students. Most are in general education classes learning the same curriculum as their peers. Blended classes with special education teachers and paraprofessionals working with content area teachers are described as very beneficial. A special educator attends content area department meetings as a partner in curricular and instructional decisions.

A high expectation for all students is clearly a school focus: “What can we do so students do the best they can? Then we look to see what supports they need.” According to an administrator, 90% of students in the special education program graduate with a Regents diploma. Very few drop out of high school. He adds, “We are only limited by our own creativity to make it work.”

Reading, writing and math labs serve AIS (Academic Intervention Services) needs. The school has a structured study hall program for struggling students: five to ten students per study hall with a paraprofessional to help with organization, planning, and time management skills. For students who need more support, there is the advanced structured study hall with a special education teacher as well as The Learning Center. It is reported that all teachers are available

before and after school for extra help. With the rise of autism, the district now has an Autism Spectrum Disorder Group. Classroom teachers have been educated about autistic students' needs. The high school also has a new Life Skills class where severely disabled students are learning cooking, banking, gardening, and other life skills. "They are out and about the school and very accepted [by the student body]."

The Alternative High School comes under the special education umbrella but is not for special education students. Ten to fifteen at-risk students attend the Alternative School, which is housed on site. It is partially self-contained, with students taking English, social studies and math with the same teacher and paraprofessional. They go out for science and gym. A guidance counselor says the program gives them "that one-to-one contact they need."

In a Nutshell

Honeoye Falls-Lima School District's Strategic Plan provides the framework and vision for fulfilling the goal of student achievement. With the support and participation of the community, the district invests resources in professional development and instructional programs in pursuit of this goal. The high school faculty and administration are fully engaged in fostering success through a culture of high expectations, collaboration, and concern for all students.

Honeoye Falls - Lima High School
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ⁱ Demographic data are of students in the 2002 entering cohort and are from the 2005-06 New York State Report Card (<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/AllDistrict.do>). This case study was conducted in spring 2008.

ⁱⁱ This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Just for the Kids-New York, beginning in 2005. For the study of high schools, conducted during the 2007-08 school year, research teams investigated ten consistently higher-performing and five average-performing high schools based on student performance on New York State Assessments of English, mathematics, science, and history. Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation, to determine differences in practices between higher- and average-performing schools in the sample. In half the higher-performing schools, from one-third to three-quarters of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Average-performing schools were matched as closely as possible to the higher performers in terms of student poverty levels, geographic location, size, and student ethnicity. Results were organized along five broad themes that form the framework of the national Just for the Kids Study of which the New York study is part. The national study has been sponsored by the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA).