

Case Study: Maple Grove Junior/Senior High School

When they leave this building, the high school, are they ready to be successful in whatever they have chosen to do? We understand, in this day and age . . . you should know what you're interested in, what you're good at, some things you might have skills in, and some preparation here to help you then go further, whether it be college or trades or whatever you have in mind. – superintendent



School Context

Maple Grove Junior-Senior High School is located at the top of a rise with sweeping views of the surrounding wooded hills and valleys. In addition to Maple Grove Jr/Sr HS, Bemus Point Central School District has an elementary school that serves Kindergarten through fifth grades located about five miles away. The district borders the eastern shore of Lake Chautauqua, which is a popular vacation and resort area in western New York. The section of the Village of Bemus Point that borders the lake was described by one staff member as an idyllic community that looks like a Norman Rockwell painting. Some executives and professionals who work for engineering and manufacturing companies in the region live along the lake shore year-round, though many properties are owned by out-of-towners. Areas of the district away from the lake shore are less affluent, consisting of farmland and recently built lower-cost rental units.

Like other districts in the region, Bemus Point CSD is experiencing significant demographic changes. Since 2004, according to the New York State Education Department, district enrollment declined from around 900 to fewer than 700 students. The percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch increased from around 10% in 2010 to over 30% in 2017. When the enrollment decline started, the school board explored the possibility of merging with other small districts in the area, according to the superintendent, but eventually decided on an alternative strategy of trying to become a “destination” district. “We thought,” he explained, that “we need to really enhance what we do here as best as we can to draw people to come to this district and increase enrollment.”

One part of this strategy was to undertake a \$16.5 million capital improvement project that included major renovations to the Jr/Sr High School. The two-story building houses sixth through twelfth grades along with the district’s administrative offices. The school’s large main entryway includes couches and space where seniors can hang out between classes. To the left of the entry are the administrative offices, the nurses’ clinic, a spacious guidance and counselling center, and classrooms. Wide hallways are lined with red student lockers organized so that each grade level has a specific area. To the right of the main entrance are an auditorium, new science and technology classrooms, and renovated athletic and exercise facilities. Across the back of the school are athletic fields.

Student Demographics 2016-17: Maple Grove Jr/Sr High School, Bemus Point CSD

	Maple Grove Jr/Sr HS	Bemus Point CSD	New York State
Grades Served	6-12	K-12	K-12
Total Enrollment	410	689	2,629,970
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	33%	55%
English Language Learners	-	-	9%
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
African-American	1%	1%	17%
Hispanic/Latino	1%	1%	26%
White	96%	96%	44%
Multiracial	0%	0%	2%
Other	2%	1%	10%

Demographic data are from the state report cards for 2016-17 (<https://data.nysed.gov/>).

School Selection Criteria

Maple Grove Jr/Sr High School met the criteria of “odds beating” in this study¹ because the difference between expected graduation rates for students entering 9th grade in 2010, 2011 and 2012, who are disadvantaged economically, exceeded the average performance for similar students across the state. The difference between the actual and expected graduation rates were standardized to calculate the z-score.¹ With an overall z-score of 0.86, Maple Grove High School is distinctive for exceeding expected performance on multiple measure of graduation for those who are economically disadvantaged across three cohorts of students.

This case study reports how district and school leaders, teachers, and student support staff members have approached preparing their students for college or career, with the next section highlighting those aspects of the district and school that were identified as being most salient to their odds-beating graduation rates.

Highlights

Listening with Mutual Respect and Compassion

I think [the reason for our success is] just that we look at . . . every kid with almost like a microscope. From the ones who have behavioral [issues] to the ones who are highly academic, and how can we push them and how to engage them. Like listening to the kids, listening to the teachers, listening to the parents, listening to the principals. I think what makes us successful is we listen.
– district leader

Relationships between members of the Maple Grove community were consistently described in interviews as being based upon respect and openness to alternative perspectives. Leaders described supporting each other’s professional development and working as a team to obtain the resources requested by staff members and students. Leaders were reported to solicit from staff members ideas for how to address issues encountered both inside and outside of classrooms.

Staff members regularly share with each other instructional strategies and insights into difficulties students, especially those challenged by poverty, may be having. These adults reported striving to be role models for treating each other with respect. Students, they added, are generally accepting of individual differences and welcome all as members of the school community.

Striving for Excellence in All Areas

We want to be that destination school that has rigorous academics, really preparing kids. But I'd like to get rid of rank, quite honestly, so that kids are taking classes that are of interest to them, and they're thinking about their talents, and they're thinking about careers, and they're thinking about college. I want that whole package there. We also have the sports, and we have the theater, and we have technology club, . . . science Olympiads.
– principal

To become a “destination” district, educators reported, they encourage students to develop high aspirations, to pursue those goals, and to persist despite early failures. All students are encouraged to attempt Advanced Placement or college-level courses, made possible by appropriate academic supports and flexible course scheduling. The school provides students with opportunities for artistic expression through regionally recognized art, theater, and music programs. Sports teams regularly compete for regional and state championships. Several educators shared that they sometimes struggled in school themselves, so they want Maple Grove to be a safe place for students to take risks in order to learn how to be problem solvers.

Making Connections to Support Learning and Success.

Our work with [high school staff] is the idea that you've got to tear down the old (This is my subject, my way of doing it) and really build that collaborative atmosphere. There are pockets of [interdisciplinary collaboration] . . . the [Advanced Placement (AP)] Physics and Calculus teacher, for instance, work very closely together with their two programs because they do some things that support each other.
– superintendent

Efforts to collaborate and coordinate activities between classrooms, schools, and the community were frequently mentioned by educators as a feature of the school. A “soft skills” curriculum for middle school students was codeveloped by student support staff members and teachers. The new science, technology and arts classrooms facilitate coordination of curriculum across subjects. Accessing centralized data systems allows teachers to quickly check how students are doing in their current or previous classes. Educators who live in the community described building positive relationships with parents, who are also able to view online their children’s assignments and overall progress. Student support staff members reported using their connections to community agencies to get resources and supports for students and their families. These efforts and supports, educators stated, are to help students realize their plans for after graduation, whether they go on to college or begin pursuing a career.

A Closer Look

These highlights are evident throughout the five dimensions that frame the study of which this case is one part. The sections below expand on each of these findings within the context of the study's framework

Curriculum and Academic Goals

I hope [a graduate is] someone able to adapt to changing times and changing technology and able to think critically and think for themselves and adapt to changes in the world and changes in careers that are out there. – school leader

Several years ago, the staff at Maple Grove developed a vision of what a graduate from their school should be like. School leaders explained that graduates should be creative, conscientious, empathic, hardworking, analytical and well-rounded citizens. In interviews, educators described their goals for students to be risk takers, problem solvers and life-long learners. In this section, educators detail how they work to provide students a variety of opportunities for academic success and personal growth.

Encouraging Students to Be Academic Risk Takers

I'm always telling kids that "kids that take [Advanced Placement] classes are much more successful whether it's college, or career, or trade school. They're much more successful because they've learned how to challenge themselves." . . . I want them to feel like this is the place, it's safe to do it here. If they fail it, let's figure it out, let's pick up the pieces, but using any failures to continue to move ahead. – principal

The mission of preparing students for college and/or career was a common theme in interviews. Like the principal, both teachers and student support staff members also described encouraging students to be independent learners with a belief in themselves and willingness to take academic risks to push themselves. These efforts, they reported, start by providing students early opportunities to accelerate progress through the curriculum to open up space in their schedules for more advanced level or elective courses.

We've pushed the kids that are ready and accelerated the kids who can take the Earth Science Regents at eighth grade, . . . so we can get a lot of our kids into the college courses and [Advanced Placement] courses. – district leader

Over the last five years the school has steadily expanded its offering of AP and college-level courses in conjunction with an area community college or via a distance education network. Courses include Latin, United States history, psychology, biology, statistics, calculus, computer science, and physics. The superintendent and principal both mentioned that online AP courses are allowing the school to diversify its offerings and provide more flexible course scheduling so that these courses can be made available to any student who is interested. The principal recalled being frustrated by restricting advanced courses to only top students, recalling that being able to only place the top eighth of a cohort in a college-level United States history course "just kind of drove me crazy:"

What about those kids that, you know, might not be in the top eighth but they do well or they're interested in being a history teacher or something like that. If we do the AP online, then we can offer it to anyone that wants to take it. – principal

The greater flexibility in scheduling comes from students taking online courses being able to connect to the system at any point during the school day. However, the school is offering “blended” courses in which students access online courses in the library but then meet with teachers when they struggle with the material. The principal and superintendent both indicated that efforts to expand online and blended course offerings will continue so that more students can take an advanced course that interests them. “I would like to have every student take a least one online class before they leave,” the principal explained, adding, “Because . . . so many college classes now are online . . . we thought it would be important that we teach the kids that skill.”

Teaching Students Problem-Solving and Management Skills

[Students are] our customers; we owe it to them. We need to be in a class on time. We need to role model. . . . People get tired of me talking about [soft skills], but I think they're huge. I think the soft skills should be an important part of every classroom. I gave the teachers a list over the summer of what should be included in their syllabus, just some suggestions, but I've been letting them know that next year I want to really see the soft skills in the syllabus. – principal

In addition to promoting academic risk taking, educators at Maple Grove stressed that they also work to enhance students’ ability to work independently and develop strategies for overcoming obstacles to their success. They explained that development of these soft skills helps to prepare students to be functioning citizens and productive members of society. In addition to getting to class on time, the principal said, she expects that students arrive with their homework completed.

Efforts to teach students soft skills start in the elementary grades and continue in middle school. In particular, many educators mentioned a life-skills program that was codeveloped by guidance counselors, health teachers, and family and consumer science teachers to help sixth and seventh graders adjust to the middle school environment. The curriculum includes skills such as note taking and strategies for dealing with stress and maintaining good sleeping habits.

Needing to prepare students for New York State’s Regents Examinations constrains the curriculum in the high school, several teachers noted. However, they added, they are not expected to “teach to the test” but to use State Standards to guide curriculum development and to ensure appropriate rigor. They described preparing students to be “well-rounded citizens” by teaching them skills such as critical thinking and communication.

The principal gave an example of developing critical reasoning skills in a rigorous and aligned lesson, explaining,

When I go into social studies and talk with [teachers], it's not about the exam. It's about . . . teaching kids to be able to dive into stuff, find evidence to support what they're doing. . . . I've always really aligned [the curriculum] to what those Standards are and making sure the rigor's there.

Another school leader explained that a primary responsibility is to prepare students with the knowledge and skills specified in the State Standards, which are aligned with what students will need after they leave school. For example he said, “For seniors, I think it’s really crucial because a lot of the Standards have to do with being an effective and informed and engaged citizen.” However, he continued, teachers should also demonstrate those skills and dispositions:

We stand up there in front of them every day and they sit there, maybe they listen to some of what you say and do the work you ask them to do. They’re sitting there looking at you and it’s being absorbed into them what an adult is like. What it is to be a decent human being. The opportunity to have that kind of impact on their lives, I think, is a huge honor and responsibility as well.

Helping students develop and practice problem-solving skills continues outside of classrooms, several educators said. For example, the “senior lounge” is a place for students to hang out and study during the day as they might do in college. Counselors described working with students on ways to ensure that they get to school on time, encouraging them to be a “thinker” or “problem solver.” A current initiative in the school, according to the principal, is to encourage students to seek information from sources other than teachers. After noticing students immediately lining up at teachers’ desks to ask about assignments and realizing that they had become extremely dependent on their teachers, she gave teachers signs reading, “Ask three then me.” As she explained,

They’re so dependent on asking questions so that they don’t get anything wrong. There’s nothing wrong with getting things wrong, that’s where you figure out “Where am I going to go from here?”. . . They don’t depend on themselves enough. [Making them seek help from other sources] is how I think we’ll teach them to be problem solvers. At least it’s one of the ways.

Creating Graduates with a Love of Learning

Exposing students to wider experiences and challenging them, I think is important at the high school level -- and giving them that love of education -- realizing that something challenging can also be fun.
– school leader

When describing their “most important role” in the school, teachers usually included in their responses goals for students that go beyond subject matter learning. Both school leaders and teachers repeatedly emphasized that they are role models for their students, demonstrating how to communicate with others and how to welcome different cultures. For example, one school leader included as important “showing them there is another culture out there other than what they know from Chautauqua County.”

Recognizing that students must pass Regents Exams in subjects where they might struggle, district and school leaders said, resources are organized to facilitate their timely and successful completion of such courses so they can take classes that they enjoy. For example, a district leader explained, one section of algebra is cotaught with a special education teacher to provide students weak in math with extra assistance in the classroom. Over the past several years, the class has had “very great success” with supporting these students so that they are able

to pass the Algebra Regents Examination after one year instead of putting them in a two-year algebra class. Then, she continued, students can get their additional math credits in “very practical” courses like computer science, construction, or consumer math.

The new science and technology classrooms facilitate offering classes in which students can work on projects with real world applications. These classrooms have scientific laboratory benches, some with sensors connected to computers. During the site visit, students were observed filming each other moving in front of a green screen as part of making special effects videos. Another room held equipment for a welding program. Pointing to a set of large fish tanks in the woodworking shop, one teacher explained how an aqua culture project enhances students’ understanding of how self-sustaining ecosystems work:

We fed the worms leftover vegetables from the cafeteria, and then we would feed the worms to the fish. . . . In the spring we have a couple thousand vegetable plants. We use the water to fertilize the vegetable plants. . . . By the time the tomatoes leave here they look like drums.
– teacher

Another way to realize students’ talent and potential is to offer a variety of extracurricular activities. Both teachers and students were said to take athletic activities seriously, a tradition in the community. In addition, students perform regularly at local theaters and have won a regional award for “outstanding musical production” as well as in several other categories.

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building

Once I've built some kind of culture, we come up with a norm for collaboration. Currently a norm for collaboration is pausing before you jump at someone, and you just pause and think about it, and then we start planning.
– district leader

District and school leaders reported working together to build a collaborative and collegial environment by not only strategically recruiting staff and faculty members to fit current needs but also involving them in decision making and providing opportunities to work as teams. Faculty and staff members described examples of their collective efforts to not only ensure that no child falls through the cracks but also to support each other professionally.

Creating a Community through Strategic Hiring and Integration

We've got to make sure that everyone is connected. Somehow, they want to stay here. So we build our foundation and we build our family; we build our teaching community in the community. . . . It's not just about the school.
– district leader

The positive culture and climate in the school and district were described by educators as purposively created by leaders through not only recruiting talented people but also integrating them into the district as a whole. The district leader quoted above explained the importance of helping new teachers build relationships with others and find their place in the educational community.

Although appropriate qualifications and certifications are required, adaptability and interpersonal skills of job applicants are a key consideration in the hiring and recruitment process, district and school leaders reported. For example, the superintendent said leaders must

be able to “swallow their pride” as they work to manage and motivate people. “It’s not about you, and people are going to say things,” he explained. “You need to stay focused on the students and what you’re trying to accomplish over the long haul.” When evaluating teacher applicants, the superintendent continued, he looks for a warm personality and honesty, including being willing to apologize when they “screw up.” The superintendent recalled being particularly impressed by one teacher applicant who was able to adapt to the needs of a blind student with no advanced notice during a demonstration lesson. Feedback from students is an important consideration in hiring, the superintendent added. Although the applicant pool has been shrinking, the district is still able to attract a sufficient number when positions are open.

Recruiting and allocating staff and faculty was described by leaders as purposefully considering the changing needs of the school and students. For example, one of the high school guidance counselors has a background in mental health services and teaches classes on academic and life skills for middle school students. Another example shared during the interviews was having a principal strong in organization and management be succeeded by one with experience in curriculum development and instructional improvement. Fitting the pieces together requires some unusual task assignments. The superintendent, for example, noted that he has a background in management and planning and is not unwilling to take on tasks such as the master schedule.

As described throughout this report, educators reported regularly undertaking activities beyond their formal duties, reflecting the care with which leaders have constructed the school community. A district leader stated that she is constantly working to help all staff members make their work meaningful and enjoyable, explaining,

What's their purpose? Whether it's special education teacher or guidance counselor, they really need to find their purposes and go back to what their love is. What do they want their kids to end with in their class or while they're here?

Developing Structures and Practices to Support Teamwork

They told me how they wanted to use that [weekly meeting] time. I thought, I think that's a good thing and that they need to know I'm listening to them, so I arranged it. Now, I keep checking in with them, and asking them how that time's going. – principal

In the middle of the 2016-17 school year, both the leadership and faculty were reported to be dissatisfied with how they were using the half-hour twice a week (Mondays and Wednesdays) meetings that had been negotiated in the new union contract. A replacement for monthly faculty meetings, these new meetings “just didn’t go well,” according to the principal, because no one was sure how to use the time productively. In 2017-18, the teachers developed a monthly schedule for these meetings with discussion items including student concerns, inter-curriculum or cross-curricular coordination of activities, and department meetings. The last Wednesday of each month, the principal added, is dedicated to “celebrations” that often feature desserts. Although the faculty appears happier with the new format, the principal said, she continues to ask teachers for their ideas because they are still “trying to figure it out.”

Sometimes district and school leaders use these meetings to brainstorm with staff solutions to emergent issues or concerns. The principal and a district leader added that they use such meetings to model collaboration strategies that teachers might also use in their lessons to engage students. The principal provided an example of the process planned for the week of the site visit prompted by concerns that some students who should be staying after school for

academic support were seen “getting on the bus.” Prior to the meeting, she will provide teachers with several articles on techniques for building relationships with students and improving rates of homework completion. The meeting will start with her posing the problem, “How do we get more kids to stay after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays?” Each teacher will then write down their answers on a card before sharing with others at their table. Then, over the course of the meeting teachers will switch tables until everyone has participated in sharing ideas. While not mandated, the leaders said, teachers are strongly encouraged to incorporate similar engagement strategies in their lessons.

We [the principal and district leader] have some ideas, but we're going to let the teachers roll with them first and then we'll throw our ideas and . . . scaffold them through the activity. . . . We've been looking at what we both can do, so we both will be supporting each other in how to scaffold. I will be the one watching the pulse of the teachers to know when to put our ideas out, and she'll be monitoring the activity. – district leader

Numerous examples of teamwork to support students were provided during the interviews for this study. While easier in the elementary and middle grades, teachers noted, efforts to coordinate curriculum across subjects are also being made in the high school despite challenges of scheduling and demands of Regents Examination preparation. The superintendent said that he is looking for ways to restructure the high school course schedule to facilitate greater collaboration and coordination, noting that:

There's some very nice collaboration that goes on but as a whole, I think, there's more that could happen there, and that's going to come when we can blow that schedule up a little bit and make it more amenable for people to do that.

Another example of teamwork was described by school counselors, who reported working with teachers and other support personnel to address students’ issues and keep them on track to successful post-graduation lives. One school leader claimed that a key aspect of the school’s success is due to all staff being able to work as a team, noting that:

We coordinate back-and-forth with the counselors to be sure that everything is in order and on time for [students’ college applications]. We have very good support people here and a very good working relationship with all of them.

This emphasis on teamwork extends to engaging parents and families as partners in supporting students, both leaders and student support staff members reported. “It’s our job to reach out to parents, and pull them into this setting, to talk with them and see if they have ideas,” the principal explained, adding, “They know their kids better than anyone else.” The focus of the school’s “instructional support teams” is to build a school-family partnership to identify and address central causes of students’ difficulties, both leaders and support professionals said. These arrangements may involve compromises, one leader noted, such as a student going to an aunt’s house for a quiet place to study.

Further, several teachers described building relationships with parents prior to the point at which problems arise. Many teachers are also members of the community, so the parents of their

students are also neighbors or the parents of their children’s friends. Building a trusting relationship becomes important when a problem may arise, as a teacher explained:

[I] never miss an opportunity to pass along goodwill toward parents when I see them at a sporting event or another activity. . . . That just builds up more good will for . . . a point when you may need it. Things don’t always go perfectly. It’s good to be part of the community, and it’s good to have as much parental engagement as possible.

Learning from and with Each Other

I’m constantly listening to what they [teachers] need, and then I’ll be the person behind the scenes to get in what they need. . . . And always, we are supposed to learn. How can we keep the teachers learning, and keep them actively going, and the fun things?

– district leader

The district provides both in-house professional development opportunities around common themes or issues and also supports staff members attending regional or professional conferences. A district leader stated that one of her key responsibilities is providing teachers and staff members with resources for improving curriculum development or instruction. For example, recently, she reported, teachers expressed a desire for training on teaching students with dyslexia and recommended an expert at an area university. So she invited that expert to visit the school. Because the district is small, several educators noted, they are often the only person teaching a particular subject, which limits their exposure to alternative approaches. Attending regional workshops or visiting other schools, several noted, provides them important opportunities to get ideas by interacting with others in similar positions. “Our teachers are like sponges,” a district leader said; “they want to see things.”

Educators described collectively figuring out how to put new knowledge and skills into practice. District and school leaders, for example, reported leaning heavily on each other. “In terms of managing your building and people skills,” the superintendent said, “we really rely on each other to try to develop those skills and try to help guide each other.” Similarly, teachers reported exchanging instructional techniques during the twice weekly meetings. These meetings also provide valuable time for “curriculum talk,” said a district leader.

The [administrators] have given us freedom in the classroom to help us to create our own resource network and we’ve got more time together to collaborate. That never was the case [before], but they see the need and they’ve provided it, which I think is essential.

– teacher

The exchange of knowledge and skills also crosses professional boundaries, with teachers and other professionals sharing with each other insights into the lives and needs of students. Several teachers reported benefitting from varying perspectives after hearing about students’ behavior in different settings during their weekly meetings. Student support staff members reported that they have dual roles of monitoring students and educating faculty on mental health and other social issues affecting students. These professionals shared examples of providing teachers with strategies to help students failing to turn in homework or crying in the bathroom after a test due to anxiety issues. Another example provided was raising teachers’ awareness of students’ family situations and perspectives that may affect student behavior or willingness to

accept assistance. For example, one student support staff member reported, some teachers may not understand why a student would refuse an enrichment opportunity such as a scholarship to a week at summer camp. She described her role, in part, as raising teachers' awareness by pointing out how a student might not be comfortable (yet) trying a new experience such as summer camp.

Educators also described some unusual examples of collaborative learning, such as the principal taking two online AP courses with students. Initially these courses were advertised to the school as "very independent" such that students could do them on their own, the principal said. To ensure students have the support that they need, she explained, she is learning the material with the students, including studying with them in her office every other day. "I love the classes," she added, noting that they are looking for ways to provide on-site instructional support for a larger array of online AP courses.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

If you treat these students like human beings and you try to relate what you're teaching to what they're experiencing, you gain a lot of headway. – teacher

I think the first thing is that, before we adapt anything, the kids have to know that you respect them. Because if they go into a classroom and they don't feel respected, they're not going to do anything for you. – principal

The word "respect" was consistently used by educators to describe their approach to instruction. With awareness of students' diverse backgrounds, educators reported providing differentiated instruction and extra academic support to better serve their students' learning needs. This section describes how school leaders and teachers adapt their instruction to meet various student learning needs, use strategies to promote student engagement, and initiate interdisciplinary programs to enhance students' understanding of content.

Adapting Instruction to Students' Learning Needs

Students in the room are the focus, so you have to adapt your curriculum and practices to who is in front of you – it's always different. . . . As far as revising my own curriculum, it's through trial and error. You see what works and what doesn't work and you try and find ways to get a better output out of it. . . . With literature it'd be very easy to teach the same thing every year, but I can teach the same book for 10 consecutive years and teach it differently because of the kids that are in that classroom. – teacher

Classroom instruction is expected to be differentiated and individualized to better serve students with various learning needs and abilities. Communication and collaboration are used in core subjects and across grade levels to provide extra support for special education students. With extra support and resources, high-needs students also have a chance to aim high and accelerate their learning, as their advanced peers do. For example, a teacher shared a case of how she is assisting a special education student with dyslexia prepare for college:

I have one student in particular [who is] . . . dyslexic. He wants really badly to go to college. I'm trying to teach him to be independent with his reading and using assistive technology. . . . [A district administrator] and I are now going to go to [a university]

Center for Assistive Technology . . . and we're going to sit down and meet with them and find out what is the assistive technology that our students should be using. – teacher

In interviews, teachers indicated that they have adopted a data system that tracks students' performance from third grade. They also use portfolios and talk with students' previous teachers to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and offer individualized instruction accordingly. Students are required to complete different types of classroom tasks depending on their needs and abilities. As a teacher reported:

As far as [a course for struggling] kids, I only give 10-15 minutes of homework. I only base [grades] on completion. Did they give an honest effort? Did they not? . . . My [course for advanced] kids, it's a different world. . . . I try to push them as hard as I can because I know at some point soon they are going to have to take the SATs. So, how to balance that speed but accuracy point to kind of push them, but still get them to believe that they can do the math or excel at the math? I constantly try to show challenge problems as well try to beef them up, because some kids kind of eat it like candy and they just kind of go through it, whereas some kids, they're struggling. – teacher

To ensure individualized and differentiated instruction, teachers are allowed autonomy in their classrooms. A school leader reported that some instructional practices are “strongly encouraged” but not “mandated” -- “an inappropriate word” at Maple Grove. Another school leader mentioned that teachers are encouraged to bring their “completely own personality and worldview” into their classrooms because that “gives students a different perspective on the whole wide range of adults out there that they could emulate.” Such autonomy is not only offered to teachers but to students. As a teacher noted, when students have freedom, they are more apt to engage in class and take responsibility for their behaviors:

It's a very open atmosphere. It's not so regimented as them sitting in the desk in the line, right? And they like that freedom. They like being able to take control of their direction and having smaller classes. Allowing that individual one-on-one too is crucial because it enables you. . . . You don't have to help the kid that gets it. The one next to him that doesn't, I can spend more time with them and maybe use that kid that does get it to help that kid. So the kids are a big resource for me . . . elevating them from a subservient point of view. Getting them control over the direction they have in your course. Get them down to that power to decide what they're going to do. It releases you from a lot of responsibility, puts it on them and they reflect better when they recognize they are the managers of their own faults and their own successes. – teacher

Teachers also described adapting their use of homework to accommodate the challenges encountered by their students living in poverty. One teacher explained that she put more emphasis on students' attitudes rather than grades, as she gave students credit as long as they turned in their homework. “I try to teach them to be responsible,” said the teacher. Another teacher noted that some students had to take care of their siblings and do housework after school, and these family obligations made it hard for them to complete homework at home. The teacher explained how he allocates time for students to do their homework in class and offers extra assistance when needed:

We try to get the majority of everything we need to get done in class because at least then they're there, they're in front of me. If they have questions you can get to it. . . . They don't have support at home. They aren't thinking about school when they get home. They don't have time to do it when they get home. . . . These kids have issues and that is their priority and it's understandably their priority. – teacher

Engaging Students in Learning

Either they're interested or they're not interested. I think any teacher can tell whether a student is engaged in the class or not engaged and I think if we focus on working on the students that are not engaged, well, it's certainly not ignoring the students that are engaged, that we're making progress. You hope for a hundred percent, you keep working for it, but realistically, you're probably never going to have a hundred percent. But that doesn't mean that we can't keep striving to get it. There's always better ways to do what we're doing. So I think if we stay open to that, we can get more of this success. – teacher

Despite teachers' different teaching styles, they share a common goal of engaging students in class. A strategy that some teachers use to promote classroom engagement is to align content to students' everyday lives. For example, a teacher explained how he connected a unit on *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* to students' authentic experiences:

I want them to have an authentic experience with the text. So, making it relatable to them, the themes, the position that the character goes through may have nothing to do with the life of the student. If we're teaching Cuckoo's Nest, . . . they're not living on a [psychiatric] ward, but the fact that they're dealing with authority breathing down their necks and telling them that we know what's best for them and that they need to follow this rigid routine, that relates to them; and if you can make it accessible to them, it means more to them. – teacher

Teachers are also provided professional development opportunities on promoting student engagement. As mentioned earlier, the principal and district leaders have been using strategies for shared decision making in staff meetings that teachers are encouraged to use to increase student engagement. The principal gave an example of how to use these strategies in lessons to ensure that all students are engaged:

When you use the strategies, every student in your classroom is participating. There's one called number chips, and kids get whatever -- five chips -- and every time they talk they have to put a chip in the middle of the table. Once their chips are gone, they can't talk. You got the kids that talk a lot, and they're done with their chips, but those other kids have to add something; they have to get rid of their chips.

Technology is also widely used in classrooms as a way to engage students. Every student at Maple Grove is assigned a laptop to use to access class materials and submit assignments. Although some teachers complained about technological limitations, they acknowledged that this digital tool enables them to easily communicate assignments and put up notes.

Enhancing Interdisciplinary Collaboration

I was able to have the social studies teacher come in and talk to my [math classes]. . . . We were doing a unit on fallacies, so he related it to some government issues like gun control. It's neat when you can do something like that because it's interesting for the kids.
- teacher

Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues in other disciplines as a way to promote students' interest and enhance their understanding of content. Some of this takes place in the middle school, with an interdisciplinary STEAM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math). And as demonstrated in the quotation above and in earlier sections of this report, high school teachers are encouraged to cross disciplinary boundaries, as well.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

A lot of times my referrals go to people that I know can continue [to see the student]. . . . I usually know most of them, plus I know if there's . . . a psychiatrist there. A lot of times I ask the parents to [let me] sign the consent with them, and I maintain contact with the [outside provider] . . . just maintain an email of making sure the parents are connected and understand the connection, because . . . I knew the family might not understand all their services.
- student support staff member

Educators at the school described continually monitoring students' academic and social development along with how programs and practices are working. They have conversations about not only information kept in administrative and assessment data systems but also knowledge gained from listening to each other, students, and families.

Having Conversations around Data

We can look at any of our students' state assessments from the time from sixth grade to eighth grade, and then add the Regents [Examination results] . . . and then we can build conversations off of that.
- district leader

District leaders have worked with teachers and other staff members to develop a culture around querying multiple sources of information on students and programs. The district holds "data meetings" three times a year, a district leader said, in which information from the state assessments is presented as a basis for starting conversations that lead staff members to "look a little deeper into the data." A frequent question asked at these meetings, several educators said, is whether the test results reflect what they see in their classrooms. Teachers now come to district leaders, one said, asking for information on an individual student, a particular class, or across subjects for a grade level. Several teachers noted that these baseline data can be used to design instructional activities that build on students' strengths.

Keeping Track of Students' Academic and Social Development

If we know we have a kid in common, we usually talk. . . . When I'm having a problem with a student, I might bring up their grades [in the schoolwide data system] and I can see what the student has for everybody else; it's right there. – teacher

While only a district leader can access the state data system, teachers and other staff members have access to an integrated schoolwide data system that compiles administrative information such as attendance, grades, and records of parent meetings. This school data system provides educators with information for identifying and addressing needs of students who are at risk of not graduating. Student support staff members described this process as starting with looking at students' attendance patterns and reviewing conversations with students and parents about reasons for missing school. Then they review academic data to see what sort of difficulties these students are having in classes. One of these professionals explained that they ask themselves, "Are [students] not coming because there's some academic delay that we need to provide an intervention for? Do we need to customize instruction so that [students] feel successful here?"

Several teachers reported that seeing how students are doing in other contexts and subjects can help them understand kids better and develop strategies to help them be successful. Recently the district started using an online test manager in which teachers create assessments for their classes aligned with the State Learning Standards. Whether quickly checking on student knowledge using a daily "entry or exit ticket" or a test at the end of a curriculum unit, the principal explained, teachers link their questions to the Standards so that they can later "look at the data to see how the kids did." The system makes giving meaningful feedback to students easier, the principal added:

We have to give kids feedback. The kids, I think when you talk Standards with the kids, and you put it all in kid friendly terms, it's more meaningful to them. That's why [teachers] all need to have learning targets on their board, every day, and that should be a part of their lesson, because the kids get it. They like them. It's really funny; when we started putting learning targets on the board, when I started requiring it, it's funny to listen to kids talk about learning targets. They're responding to it. – principal

Students' progress towards their post-graduation targets is tracked in another centralized online system in which they can compile information needed for college applications. Starting in sixth grade, several educators mentioned, students complete inventories of their interests and begin researching career options. Students also compile in the system a portfolio of class work and college application materials. Finally, teachers add their letters of recommendation before students start submitting application packets to colleges through the system. These materials remain available for four years after students have graduated from Maple Grove.

Using Evidence for Strategic Decision Making

When I started this job, kids used to go to [a regional] vocational program just because it was a great way to get out of school, and it was a blow-off half day. So I now have an application process, and they have to fill out an application, and then I interview them along with the guidance counselors. I have to say that we've sent far fewer kids to [the

program], but the kids that go are much more serious about it. It's more of a career pathway for them.
– principal

School and district leaders were reported to continually question and seek diverse sources of information to use in guiding improvement efforts. When asked about vocational programs for students, several educators mentioned that the principal discovered, by calling graduates who had attended the regional vocational programs, that many were not using what they had learned. As stated in the quote above, now students attending these programs must have a specific career goal.

Educators provided other examples of how evidence is collected to guide decision making. As noted earlier, leaders are monitoring how students are doing in their online AP courses to determine what supports they need to be most successful. A student support staff member described organizing course schedules to prevent tracking of students by ability level, noting that they tell students, “We want you to enjoy your time here; we want you to try different things and be with different people.” Throughout the interviews, educators described multiple approaches to improve how they are monitoring the academic and social health of the students and school.

Recognitions, Interventions and Adjustments

It's just a lot of reminders. . . . “How's it going?” Connecting with [students], making sure they know they're being held to a higher standard. Giving them a little flexibility to be themselves, because they have to be. That's what adds to the school; personality makes it fun.
– student support staff member

Educators described having an integrated and comprehensive view of youth that extends beyond the classroom. They explained their efforts to knit together various individual faculty and staff efforts, services, and programs, trying to ensure that no student “falls through the cracks.” This vision appears to guide their work in supporting students through the transition from high school to career or post-secondary education. The work begins early, in 6th grade, and involves identifying individual student interests and talents and increasingly tailoring instruction and opportunities to those interests and goals. Finally, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate talent and mastery outside the classroom were identified by the principal and teachers, as well as the importance of supportive adults inside and outside the school recognizing students for these accomplishments.

Ensuring “No Child Falls through the Cracks” Using Early and Integrated Responses

We, as teachers and administrators, and the district itself, take education very seriously and really try to do everything we can to reach everyone. We don't want to . . . [let] kids fall through the cracks. We try not to allow that to happen. We try to push the kids to be the best that they can be.
– teacher

As the population of students in the school shifts to include greater numbers of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the district continually adapts and repositions resources to meet changing needs, according to educators. They described a variety of

approaches used to support students who are struggling academically or socioemotionally. Overall, they explained, they seek early, thorough, and complete youth-centered interventions.

The superintendent reported viewing Response to Intervention (RTI) as a practice that “undergirds helping all students and especially those who have learning difficulties. . . . It is part of our success.” RTI is carried through high school, the superintendent said, with student success the responsibility of all faculty and staff members. According to student support staff members, teachers will forgo prep time to work with a student who is struggling academically.

The school is also placing greater emphasis on use of after-school time to support students who are struggling academically. The principal continues to work with teachers to better identify students who are in need of this additional support. For example, each week, the principal prints a list of students who have below a 70 (i.e., passing grade) in any class and distributes it to teachers. These students are required to stay after school two days per week and the principal expects these students to be working with teachers or her during free periods.

[Everyone] makes sure that kids stay [after school], and if they aren't staying, we make sure why and we're chasing them down . . . or making sure they're put with somebody that's making sure they get where they need to go and not just wasting time.

– student support staff member

Peers also serve as supports to others who are struggling with academics. Students in the National Honor Society work as tutors to assist classmates, according to student support staff members.

In the guidance department, one counselor serves students in grades 6-9 while a second counselor covers grades 10-12. This division of labor enables one guidance counselor to give 9th graders more attention than would be possible for the high school counselor, whose 12th graders often require a significant amount of time to prepare for the transition from high school to career or post-secondary education. And ninth grade can be a vulnerable time, according to the guidance department. The 6th-9th guidance counselor meets with every student twice a year on an individual basis. Early intervention is viewed as vital by student support staff members.

When students encounter emotional difficulties, the guidance office reportedly has an open-door policy. Student support staff members related that their separate office (not connected to school administration) facilitates better access and utilization by students. They described creating an inviting space, and early and frequent connections, as fostering trusting relationships. If more pronounced psychological or mental health issues emerge, the guidance counselor – who has training and previous experience in mental health – refers students to outside community services. The open-door policy also extends to teachers, who will consult student support staff members about behaviors, disciplinary issues, or emotional concerns they have about students.

No matter the need, faculty and staff said they will find a way to meet it. A student support staff member described the program the school runs during the holidays to ensure that students and families get gifts and other goods they need, adding that faculty and staff will step in to provide for students who cannot afford a field trip. Every effort is made to ensure that all students can participate in extracurriculars no matter their economic status. Being a rural community, transportation is difficult, but students will look out for each other if, for example, someone needs a ride, and faculty and staff actively facilitate this peer support by connecting peers in need to those who can help.

Individualizing and Customizing Pathways to Meet Diverse Student Needs and Interests

The vision that leaders, faculty members, and student support staff members articulated for their ideal graduate is reflected in the programs and practices used to produce these graduates. At the vision's core, educators said, their graduates need to be ever evolving, forward looking, and intentional. As described by student support staff members, the planning is iterative, and youth centered and begins early, with 6th graders considering their strengths and interests through interest surveys and other activities. As students progress through high school, they consider their goals more concretely, what different paths will afford them, and the alignment between their goals and their path. For example, student support staff members discuss topics such as budgeting and finances and the type of life students want to have. This work is done through the guidance office. The availability of online AP courses and college courses at the local community college allow high school students to align their coursework to their post-graduation goals.

According to student support staff members, a new computer program will assist with capturing the post-graduation planning that begins at the middle level; it will also help with tracking students after graduation. While the option of attending college is strongly promoted, the intention of the staff is to make clear that it is an opportunity available to all, not that it is the only opportunity of value to pursue. Technical and trade education is offered to students with post-graduation goals aligned to this type of training. As reported above, the high school recently implemented an application process for technical and trade education designed to ensure careful reflection and consideration of how the program supports a student's future plans.

The focus for students in the self-contained special education program is building job and life skills. A program allows special education students to go into the community to pursue internships as a way of gaining job and social skills, as described by a teacher. For example, students run a "micro-business" called the Dragon Café. Located in the school, the café sells baked goods and coffee. State-run programs with transitional coordinators offer additional specialized resources and post-graduation planning support.

In addition to exploring new ways to adapt to the interests of students, educators also consider what will be demanded of students in post-secondary education and work settings. To this end, they have engaged with local businesses to explore the types of skills graduates will need to be competitive, as reported by the school principal and teachers. In part, this has driven a schoolwide effort to focus more on soft skills such as being responsible and respectful, which the school principal, teachers, and student support staff members identified as a key focus. As previously discussed, the middle school transition program now offered in 6th and 7th grades was designed to build a foundation of soft skills such as respect, responsibility and adaptability. The high school principal also follows up with students after graduation to learn about the ways in which they were prepared or underprepared for their next steps.

Celebrating Youth Talents – an Opportunity for Relationship Building

I think you have to have those social situations with kids. I really try to encourage teachers to come and see them, whether they're in the musical or they have a concert or they're playing a sport.

– principal

Maple Grove educators emphasize a culture of excellence that extends beyond academics. Athletics and the visual and performing arts are a source of pride not only for students but also

for leadership, faculty, and staff members at the school. The athletics and performing arts programs have been recognized at the regional and state levels for their quality and success, according to the principal. Leaders and staff members also noted that many students are involved in both athletics and visual and performing arts, which is reflective of the well-rounded students they hope to develop.

As described by the principal and teachers, supporting and celebrating youth in their pursuits outside the classroom is seen by them as important. Athletic competitions and games draw members from the community, and many teachers described attending these events as a way to connect with students as well as parents, families, and community members. Throughout the school, students in the musical arts programs are recognized – awards and musical programs were displayed and highlighted by the principal. Recognizing and celebrating youth for their nonacademic strengths, talents, and abilities was said to be school- and communitywide.

The extracurricular activities offered are also reflective of the interests of the community in general, and therefore, the students. For example, hunting is a part of the community, and instruction around hunting has been offered as an extracurricular activity in the past. Other activities have involved hydroponics and gardening, as well as work in the shop. Educators also seek to expose students to extracurricular activities outside of school – whether it be supporting students in community-based performing arts or seeking additional education opportunities such as at a culinary institute.

Overall, consensus among Maple Grove educators is that students should be well rounded and offered opportunities to pursue and excel in many different realms other than academics. These opportunities are seen not just as a supplement to youth development but a key component of it, one that is the responsibility of faculty and staff members to create space for and recognize students for. Ultimately, this attention to and celebration of the whole youth, which was described by the principal and teachers, facilitates bonding and relationship building between adults in the school and young people, while also giving youth spaces to feel a sense of accomplishment.

In a Nutshell

The vision that leaders, faculty members, and student support staff members at Maple Grove articulated for their ideal graduate is reflected in the programs and practices they provide to produce these graduates. The core of the vision is that graduates need to be ever evolving, forward looking, and intentional. It is these qualities that inform the approach taken to support students through transitions, particularly from high school to career or post-secondary education.

Multiple faculty and staff members echoed a teacher who said graduates should have the ability to “advocate for themselves” and function as “independent thinkers.” Another teacher described an ideal Maple Grove graduate as one who is “an effective, informed and engaged citizen” who consumes and evaluates information with purpose and intentionality. These characteristics are ones that Maple Grove educators aspire to see in all their graduates – regardless of their academic status or socioeconomic backgrounds.

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Appendix. Survey Results

As part of the study, school personnel were invited to respond to a school culture survey designed to explore how staff members perceive the quality of school life, their attitudes about cultural diversity, and relationships between members of the school community. Those with instructional responsibilities also reported on their instructional practices. The survey was distributed electronically to all staff members prior to the visit and remained open for three weeks. A total of 41 responses were received for a total response rate of 91%. Additionally, 31 respondents indicated they have instructional responsibilities in their current position.

To keep responses anonymous, identifying information was not collected. School personnel were asked to respond to a series of statements about their perceptions about the school environment, their beliefs and values regarding cultural diversity and engagement, their instructional practices, and responsiveness of these practices to diverse students.

Questions about culture asked participants to respond on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Instructional practices questions asked participants to respond on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from every day or almost every day to rarely or never. Responses are reported in the aggregate, as a percentage of total responses for each question, in Tables 1, 2 and 3, each following a brief summary.

Table 1. School Culture Inventory

Staff-School Leadership Interactions: Almost all staff members reported that they can talk with their principal when they have concerns about a student (97%) and that their principal backs them up when addressing student behavior (92%). Additionally, almost all (92%) reported that the principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions: Almost all staff members (97%) reported that parents and legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children, and almost all (92%) also reported having no difficulties communicating with families. In addition, almost all members (95%) reported that most school activities and programs involve students' families, including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Staff-Staff Interactions: Almost all staff members reported feeling accepted and respected by most staff members (95%) and working together to ensure the needs of students are met (97%).

Staff-Student Interactions: Almost all staff members (97%) reported feeling responsible for helping all students learn and succeed, engaging students in school and learning, and trying to find help for students encountering difficulties at home or in school. Almost all (97%) also reported that they are certain they are making a difference in the lives of students at the school.

Student-Student Interactions: Almost all staff members (95%) reported that most students respect classmates who excel academically. Additionally, all staff members (100%) agreed that fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language or socioeconomic backgrounds are not a serious problem.

Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices: Almost all staff members (97%) reported looking forward to learning about others’ traditions, customs, and holidays and that students of different backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need. Also, almost all staff member (95%) reported looking for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different backgrounds.

Table 1: School Culture Inventory

Staff members were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree, Agree, or Somewhat Agree	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, or Somewhat Disagree
<i>Staff-School Leadership Interactions</i>		
The principal and other leaders communicate a clear vision for positive relationships among students and staff members of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	92%	8%
The principal and other leaders back up staff members when addressing student behavior problems.	92%	8%
I can talk with my principal(s) when I am concerned about a student.	97%	3%
<i>Staff-Parent, Family, and Community Interactions</i>		
Staff members have strong ties to various groups in the local community.	79%	21%
Most parents/legal guardians have high educational expectations for their children.	97%	3%
Most school activities and programs involve students’ families including those from different ethnic, cultural, language and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	95%	5%
I have difficulties communicating with students' families.	8%	92%
I receive a great deal of support from students' families for the work I do.	84%	16%
<i>Staff-Staff Interactions</i>		
Staff members work together to ensure that all students are in school every day ready to learn.	97%	3%
I feel accepted and respected by most staff members.	95%	5%
<i>Staff-Student Interactions</i>		
I feel responsible for helping all students learn and succeed in school.	97%	3%
I feel responsible for helping all students learn to treat each other respectfully.	97%	3%
I feel responsible for engaging all students in school and learning.	97%	3%
I believe that all students can learn.	97%	3%
Most students are actively engaged in learning while at school.	97%	3%
I try to find help for any student encountering difficulties at home or in school.	97%	3%
I regularly discuss with students their plans after high school.	92%	8%
I am certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students at this school.	97%	3%
<i>Student-Student Interactions</i>		
Outside of classrooms, students generally hang out with peers who are like them in their ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	73%	27%
Fights between groups of students who differ in ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are a serious problem in this school.	0%	100%
Most students respect classmates who excel academically.	95%	5%
<i>Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Practices</i>		
I look forward to learning about others’ traditions, customs, and holidays.	97%	3%
I enjoy sharing my cultural and ethnic heritage with others at my school.	89%	11%

Students and staff frequently share aspects of their backgrounds such as their traditional food, clothing, art and/or music.	82%	18%
Students and staff of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds treat each other with respect.	90%	10%
Students and staff at this school value each other's distinctive ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic differences.	87%	13%
I feel prepared to work with students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	92%	8%
I look for opportunities to learn about how to help students from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	95%	5%
Students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds who have health or other problems get the services that they need.	97%	3%
Academic expectations are low for some students of different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	5%	95%

Table 2. Teacher Interactions

The most common instructional practices that instructional staff members reported occurring at least once per week include: 1) collaborating in planning and preparing instructional materials (47%); 2) sharing learning about teaching experiences (40%); and 3) discussing students with academic difficulties (40%). In contrast, the least common instructional practices (76%) reported by instructional staff members were almost never or never visiting another teachers' classroom to learn about or provide feedback on teaching and having another teacher visit their classroom to learn new strategies or provide feedback on teaching.

Table 2. Teacher Interactions

Teachers were asked how often they had the following interactions with other teachers, including instructional coaches, in this school:	Every day to 1-2 days per week	1-2 days a month to every 1-2 months	Almost never or never
Discuss how to teach a particular topic.	37%	53%	10%
Collaborate in planning and preparing instructional materials.	47%	43%	10%
Share what I have learned about my teaching experiences.	40%	43%	17%
Visit another classroom to learn more about or provide feedback on teaching.	3%	21%	76%
Another teacher visits my classroom to learn new strategies or to provide feedback on my teaching.	3%	21%	76%
Analyze or review student data.	30%	57%	13%
Work together to try out new ideas for engaging students.	30%	57%	13%
Participate in professional development.	33%	60%	7%
Practice new skills.	30%	57%	13%
Discuss students with academic difficulties.	40%	60%	0%
Share strategies for communicating with students' families.	16%	77%	7%

Table 3. Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Few instructional staff members (20%) reported altering the content of lessons, tasks, or assessments to reflect diversity in students’ ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds 3-5 days per week, while 37% reported rarely or never altering their practices. Additionally, few (20%) reported purposely placing students in work groups with peers who are different ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically or who speak another language 3-5 days per week, while 37% report rarely or never engaging in this practice.

Table 3: Instructional Decisions for Diverse Students

Frequency with which staff:	3-5 days per week	1-2 days per week or every few weeks	Rarely or Never
Alter lesson’s content, tasks, or assessments to take into account students’ different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	20%	43%	37%
Purposely have students work in groups with peers from different ethnic, cultural, language, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.	20%	43%	37%

ⁱ This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Know Your Schools~for NY Kids since 2005. In 2017-18, research teams investigated 10 high schools. Four of these schools were typically performing (with graduation rates as predicted for the student population served), and the remainder were odds-beating schools (with graduation rates above-predicted for the student population served). For the purposes of this study, expected graduation rates were estimated using regression analysis for two types of outcomes – proportions of cohorts earning any New York State Regents diploma and proportions of cohorts receiving an Advanced Regents diploma – using three demographic characteristics – proportions of students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, and either African-American or Latino/Hispanic. These estimates were calculated for three successive cohorts of 9th graders – 2010, 2011 and 2012 – with separate analyses for all students and four subgroups – economically disadvantaged, English language learners, African-American, and Latino/Hispanics. For each of the 30 analyses, gaps between actual and expected rates were standardized to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1 (i.e., z-score) before calculating an overall actual-expected gap by averaging these z-scores. Next, purposive sampling was used to reflect geographic and community variation around the state, with equal representation of rural, suburban and urban locales. Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers, support staff, and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation in all schools. Results of the cross-site analysis and details regarding the project’s other studies, staff, and publications can be found at www.albany.edu/nykids.