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 #SCOREPrize

THE S C O R E PRIZE

Rising to the Challenge

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

STORIES FROM THE 2014 SCORE PRIZE WINNERS AND FINALISTS



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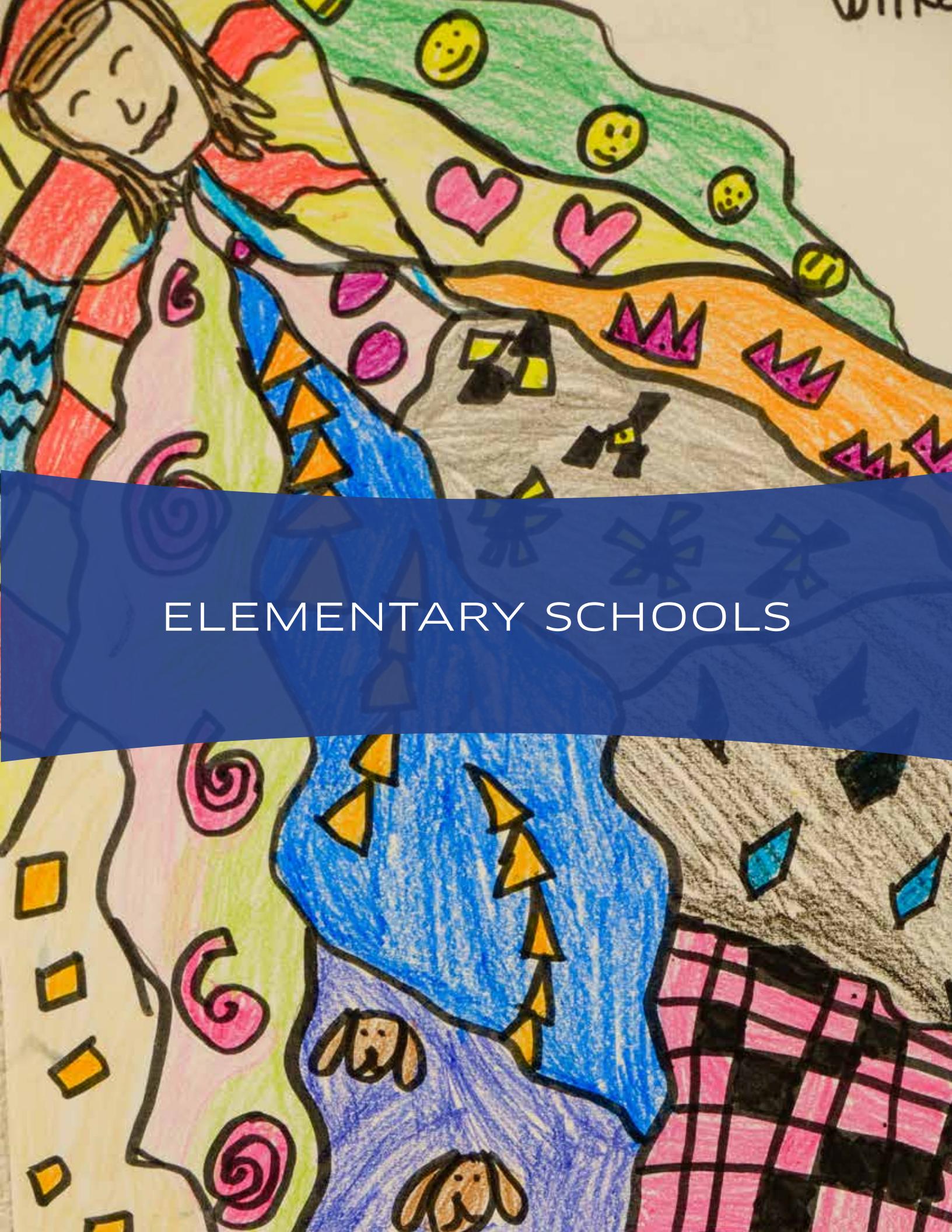
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ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Differentiated Instruction at Dresden Helps Students Achieve Their Best Work

What is your level of effort?

What is the best that you can give?

These are questions asked of students daily at SCORE Prize winner Dresden Elementary, according to fourth-grade teacher Honey Cantrell. Students are encouraged to give “their absolute.” And in classrooms driven by creative, engaging, and differentiated instruction, teachers know that students’ best work will vary highly between individuals.

Dresden Elementary, serving grades PK-4 in Weakley County Schools in northwest Tennessee, has helped its primarily low-income, rural population of students achieve remarkable results. The school posts high three-year growth marks on the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS), and Dresden students have met or outpaced statewide averages on Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) tests. About 70 percent of Dresden’s students are economically disadvantaged.

“They want to be here and they want to learn, and that’s what we get out of them,” said Melanie Needham, assistant principal and literacy leader. “We want Dresden Elementary to be a special place for kids. That’s everybody’s philosophy, from the principal to the cleaning staff.”

Dresden educators have helped students succeed by empowering them to set and reach personalized learning goals. Starting with third-grade TCAP data, third- and fourth-grade students have data binders mapping out student progress and identifying incremental goals. The binders include report cards, important assignments, STAR reading reports, and TCAP practice results. Using binders, rather than a data wall, helps students focus on individual progress rather than peer comparisons.

Students at Dresden receive highly individualized instruction. The school’s Response to Instruction and Intervention time, referred to as “Paw Power” in honor of Dresden’s lion mascot, provides 45 minutes each day to work on individual academic needs. The lowest 20 percent of academic achievers, as well as special education students, receive specialized instruction. Higher performers receive enrichment, like small-group reading lessons for students in grades K-2. Third- and fourth-grade enrichment students rotate between areas of need, including intensive math lessons, novel studies, and keyboarding and computer skills. The small-group instruction is made possible by help throughout the building. Lessons are taught by staff members including counselors, media specialists, and a physical education teacher with two decades of experience teaching middle school math.

While the school has had intervention services in place for years, “Paw Power” debuted in Fall 2014. Ms. Needham said both lower and higher achieving students are making gains, and school leaders are hopeful for more TCAP improvements.

Differentiation strategies are also in play in every classroom throughout the day. Teaching is creative and

engaging. Assignments often include both a uniform assessment portion as well as a personalized component, delivering enrichment or strengthening fundamentals as needed. Students are involved directly in lessons with iPads and Promethean boards, and teachers constantly strive to find new ways to engage their students.

Delivery of fresh, innovative lessons is enabled by high-level staff collaboration. Each grade level has 45 minutes each day of common planning time, and grade-level and cross-collaborative meetings are scheduled on a regular basis. Dresden administrators are present in classrooms, watching for opportunities to share strategies. Lines of communication are kept open.

“Nobody is expected to come here and, as the old saying goes, shut their door and teach,” Ms. Needham said. “They plan collectively and lay out common work. Sometimes you can see the common thread from classroom to classroom. You can see where they have shared materials and resources. It makes them all stronger teachers to have a group of people they can go to for support.”

This collaborative culture has ramped up in the last few years, and Ms. Cantrell sees a direct link between this development and rising school TVAAS scores.

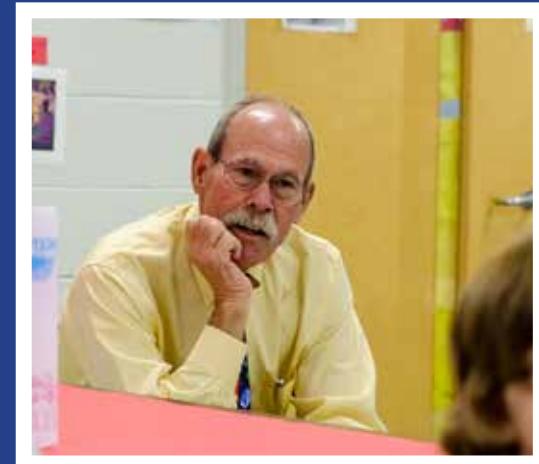
“Our lunches at this school are working lunches,” Ms. Cantrell said. “We collaborate on every single subject in every single grade. The culture of this school – it’s a community. I want to share what I’m doing with other teachers because I want to reach more students.”

Staff knowledge-sharing has been of particular help as the school has implemented technology from a state grant. Grades three and four have one iPad per student. Grades K-2 have five iPads per classroom.

Kids are “engaged to the extreme” when iPads are involved, Ms. Cantrell said. The NearPod app provides total class participation during lessons, and instant assessments allow teachers to see with the touch of a button how many students understood content.

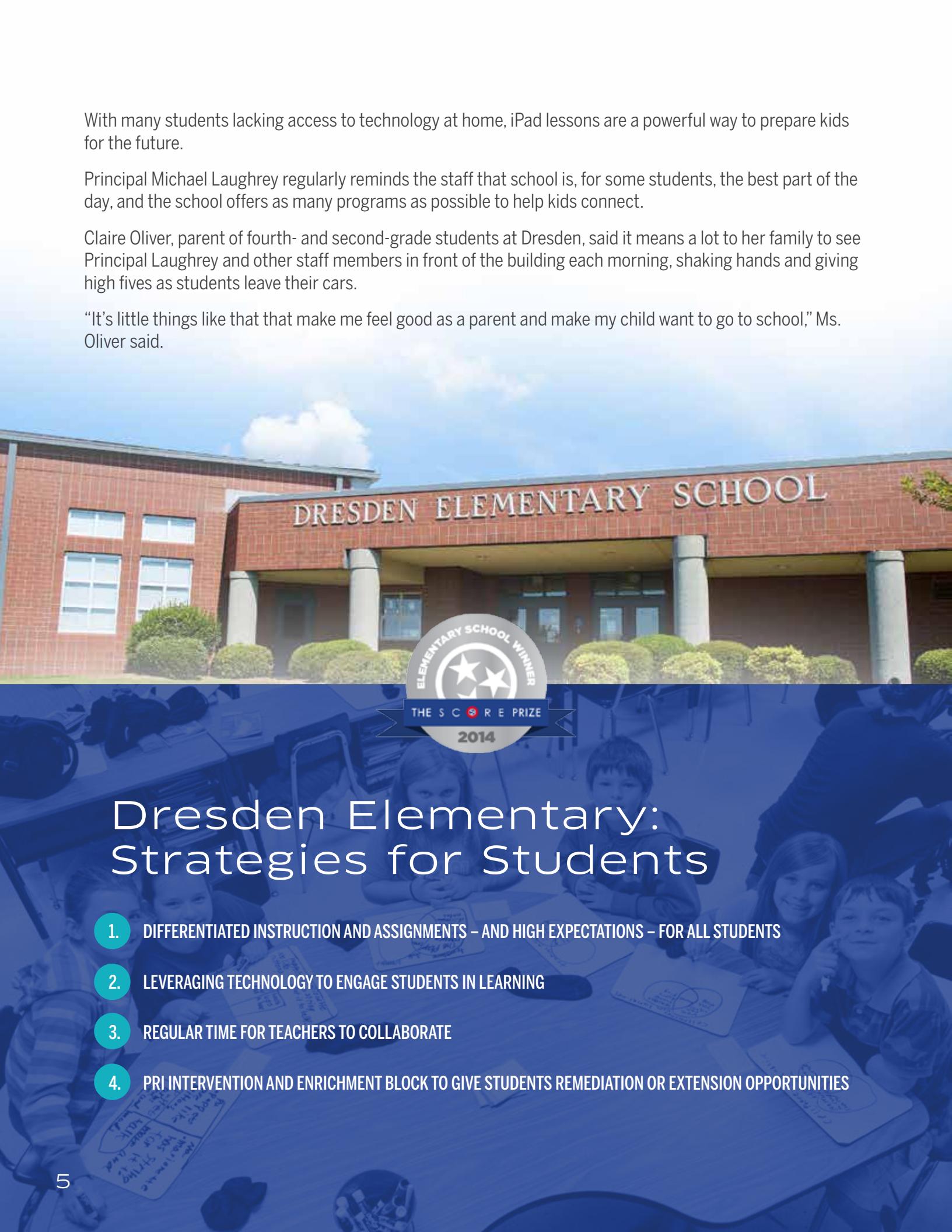
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Principal Michael Laughrey regularly reminds the staff that school is, for some students, the best part of the day, and the school offers as many programs as possible to help kids connect.





With many students lacking access to technology at home, iPad lessons are a powerful way to prepare kids for the future.

Principal Michael Laughrey regularly reminds the staff that school is, for some students, the best part of the day, and the school offers as many programs as possible to help kids connect.

Claire Oliver, parent of fourth- and second-grade students at Dresden, said it means a lot to her family to see Principal Laughrey and other staff members in front of the building each morning, shaking hands and giving high fives as students leave their cars.

"It's little things like that that make me feel good as a parent and make my child want to go to school," Ms. Oliver said.

Dresden Elementary: Strategies for Students

1. DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND ASSIGNMENTS – AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS – FOR ALL STUDENTS
2. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN LEARNING
3. REGULAR TIME FOR TEACHERS TO COLLABORATE
4. PRI INTERVENTION AND ENRICHMENT BLOCK TO GIVE STUDENTS REMEDIATION OR EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

At Highland Park, Students Own Their Achievement Data

There's a scoreboard in every fourth-grade classroom at 2014 SCORE Prize finalist Highland Park Elementary in Lenoir City.

Sure, the displays could also be called data boards. But Principal David Clinton, a former high school football coach, likes to infuse the school's data-rich culture with language that is both motivating and meaningful. Highland Park staff and students are reminded to think like a team with a three-game season. There are three comprehensive benchmark assessments throughout the year, with progress mapped by the data boards. And finally, there's the TCAP Super Bowl just before summer break.

"When the whole team advances, the whole team wins," Mr. Clinton said. "Now it's part of our culture. Kids who make progress are all winners. Inches by inches make yard by yard."

Yardage has certainly been gained by Highland Park's nearly 400 students in grade pre-K through four, about 55 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged. Students score well above average on TCAP tests, and Highland Park has narrowed the TCAP achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students in reading over the last few years. The school also shows strong growth in math and reading.

These results have been achieved by teaching students to understand and articulate levels of proficiency – and to determine and reach their own achievable goals.

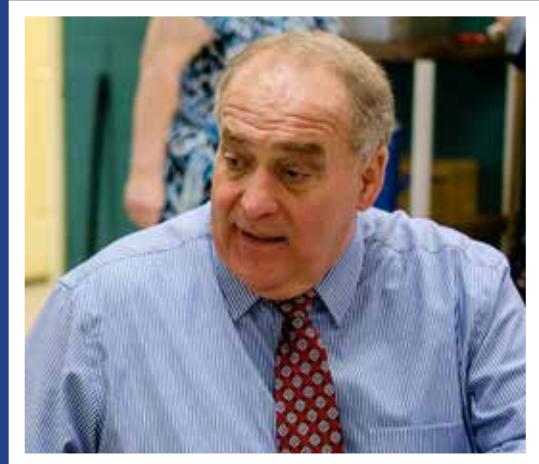
Classrooms work on this together with the help of color-coded data boards. The boards include one card for each student for every subject area on the TCAP tests. The color of each card is determined by students' third-grade TCAP proficiency levels: Blue signifies advanced, green proficient, yellow basic, and red below basic. While there is a card for each student, no names are listed on the cards – just a five-digit lunch number.

The cards are clustered at the beginning of the school year in areas of the board based on TCAP proficiency. Then, as the kids progress through three comprehensive benchmark assessments, the cards advance to show progress. The card colors don't change, so everyone remembers their starting points. Numbers in the bottom corners of the cards show how close students were to the higher and lower levels of proficiency, teaching the importance of individual questions.

"The goal is to see all those cards pile up on the proficient and advanced side of the data board by the end of each year," said Holly Hendricks, a fourth-grade teacher. "How we get there might look different for each kid, but our ultimate goal is the same for everybody."

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"When the whole team advances, the whole team wins," Principal David Clinton said. "Now it's part of our culture. Kids who make progress are all winners. Inches by inches make yard by yard."



More extensive individual information is stored in each student's data binder. Binders include checklists of standards the students need to master, individual goals, and record sheets for math and reading tests. Each time a test is taken at the end of a unit, students record their scores and identify an area they need to work on more. Students work with teachers to set goals in their binders, helping kids take ownership of their own performance and understanding of the material.

The data binder system is encouraging students to be more engaged, Ms. Hendricks said. "Our goal is for the students to always know where they are and where they need to be, and then we work together to figure out how they need to get there."

The data boards and binders were implemented a few years ago with the help of a district data coach, after lower test scores at Highland Park prompted educators to reassess their methods. The other big change made at that time was a teacher assignment shuffle that Mr. Clinton refers to as a "fruit basket turnover." Teachers throughout the building were moved, allowing administrators to intentionally build grade-level teams with compatible skills and personalities. Each grade level now has at least one experienced teacher and at least one teacher relatively new to the profession. Collaboration levels are now very high. The school's extensive data integration allows teachers to quickly see if one class is weaker in a certain area, providing an opportunity to compare strategies. The teacher reassignments combined with the data integration delivered immediate, measurable results.

The school's use of data allows teachers to communicate clearly and transparently with families. At parent-teacher conferences, educators show parents the same data binders their students use to track progress and set goals in class. Everyone is on the same page.

Highland Park's success has been bolstered by community support. A community school since the 1900s, Highland Park has many proud alumni

still living locally. This year alone, the alumni association and the PTO each raised \$10,000 for the school to invest in technology. This support plays an important role in maintaining and updating the school's excellent technological resources. Every classroom currently has a Promethean board and accompanying active response units.

The school's efforts are also well supported by its district, Loudon County Schools. The county provides timely data for the three comprehensive benchmark assessments that teachers can use to show students how other schools are progressing. Ms. Hendricks recalls a special county support not long after the data boards were first implemented – one of her students moved from basic to proficient on a test, and Loudon County Director of Schools Jason Vance called the child's family with praise and congratulations.

Mr. Clinton said he has fielded concerns about the idea of publicly displaying kids' results. But reservations are quickly resolved as stakeholders learn more. The academic gains have been undeniable. The school hasn't had problems with students identifying classmates' cards, and teachers keep conversations about data motivating and productive. Classes often focus on group performance, earning incentives by succeeding as teams. Teachers counsel students one on one to make sure gains – and losses – are processed in a positive way.

"I tell parents that the worst thing you can do is go in and say, 'But, when I was in school...' If you weren't in school one or two years ago, it's changed," Mr. Clinton said. "We got the parent buy-in because we were successful. There are many ways to solve these problems, but you have to find individual solutions, knowing your kids and families."



Highland Park Elementary: Strategies for Students

1. DATA BINDERS AND DATA BOARDS: TEACHERS ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH THEIR OWN ACHIEVEMENTS AND HELP STUDENTS SET AND REACH GOALS
2. TEACHER CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: SCHOOL LEADERS INTENTIONALLY FORM TEAMS OF COMPATIBLE PERSONALITIES WITH A RANGE OF EXPERIENCE
3. USING DATA TO INFORM CONVERSATION ABOUT INDIVIDUAL CLASSROOM STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Westwood Elementary Supports and Challenges ELL Students

Luis Gerardo Carmona moved from Mexico City to Manchester, Tennessee, two years ago, with his wife and two young sons. To call it a big transition would be an understatement. Relocating from a city of 25 million people to a town of 10,000 was change enough, to say nothing of taking on a new language and culture.

The family chose their new home based on its proximity to Westwood Elementary School, which has an excellent reputation in Manchester's Hispanic community for its work with English language learners (ELL).

Not long after the move, Mr. Carmona was glad of this decision. His five-year-old son, Matías, who was not then as proficient in English as he is now, became sick at school and was unable to communicate how he was feeling. It was a difficult situation for Matías but then a Spanish-speaking school receptionist stepped in to comfort the boy and translate for the school nurse, and Matías was feeling better by the time his mother arrived to take him home. Later that evening, three different school staff members all phoned the family to check on Matías.

"They take any chance, any opportunity, to really embrace the kids," Mr. Carmona said. "It's like a big family. They invite and take every chance to bring new people on board."

This family's experience is all in a day's work for Westwood Elementary, one of the finalists for the 2014 SCORE Prize in the elementary school category. Westwood is a school that excels at providing innovative, whole-family solutions to student learning needs.

"We really see our school as a collective family, and anyone who is connected with that, we want to make sure they feel that familial bond with us," said Thomas Fuhrman, Westwood's principal. "We make certain to involve everyone in our family."

All Westwood families are supported by a Family Resource Center, the site of community collaborations that have helped provide services ranging from parenting classes to financial support for school supplies. With more than 65 percent of the school's 500-plus students receiving free and reduced meals (FARM), Westwood receives school-wide Title I services, and staff members work hard to support students in and out of the classroom.

In the case of ELL students in particular, teachers and staff say family engagement helps break the language barrier and nurture academic growth. ELL students make up more than one-fifth of Westwood kids, and this part of the school's population is growing – Mr. Fuhrman said 10 percent of the Westwood students currently live outside the school's district and pay tuition to attend, which is due in large part to ELL services. Westwood provides Title III-funded English classes for parents, helping families learn the basics of English as well as cultural aspects of American life. A weekly tutoring and mentoring program called Circle of Friends brings more than 100 ELL students and families from across the district to Westwood for academic enrichment and homework help. And every fall, Westwood hosts the school district's ELL night, a program that invites families to school to see classrooms, meet teachers, and receive translated information about the school year.

As Westwood has welcomed families, students have demonstrated academic growth, particularly in math and science. Westwood students are 69 percent proficient or advanced in science, compared to 62 percent statewide, and the school has TVAAS growth scores in math, reading, and science well above the state average.

Mr. Fuhrman is quick to credit the school's teachers with nurturing a culture of both high expectations and caring for students. Teachers regularly come to him with a "tremendous amount of data," Mr. Fuhrman said, and a genuine concern for every student's needs is always present.

"We don't just simply teach to the middle. We teach to every child," Mr. Fuhrman said. "If we can't do that on our own, we find the support that's going to help us do that. We look for the support structures and really pursue them once we find them."

An outdoor classroom gives kids hands-on experiences with gardening, plants, and caring for rabbits. And most recently, an \$80,000 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant and a \$3,500 Bonnaroo Works Fund grant provided funding for a portable Maker Lab. About 20 kids are in the lab each day after school, working with community mentors and journaling discoveries in writing. Fourth- and fifth-grade participants have assembled a Raspberry Pi computer, built circuitry, engineered a catapult, flown a drone helicopter, and experimented with a Weatherbug station now situated at the school. Like many Westwood programs, the Maker Lab offers a family component through its monthly Family Maker Saturday event.

"Any given day after school, you'll find kids using iPad Minis to control robots," said Mr. Fuhrman.

For Westwood special education teacher Elise Layne, the school's success stems from student support structures that enable academic growth. A community spirit brings high expectations within reach.

"The children aren't afraid to take risks because they feel safe in the classroom," Ms. Layne said. "I think, when you walk through our doors, you can feel it."

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Westwood Elementary: Strategies for Students

1. ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES AND PROVIDING MATERIALS IN FAMILY'S NATIVE LANGUAGE
2. USING DATA TO DRIVE INSTRUCTION
3. PROVIDING INTERVENTION AND ENRICHMENT TO STUDENTS
4. OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR REAL-WORLD LEARNING





As an English teacher, we tend to talk a lot," said Brittney Martin. "Now I give them the information and then I back off. My students learn best from hearing each other."



Students and Teachers Alike Are Well-supported at Freedom Prep

Outstanding outcomes for students are delivered by 2014 SCORE Prize middle school finalist Freedom Preparatory Academy, a public charter school in Memphis.

But the innovative supports in place at Freedom Prep aren't just for students. Teachers at the school receive individualized, intentional coaching and development, bringing out the best in every educator and attracting professionals who want to do their best work.

"It's our mission to prepare all students to succeed in college and in life. In order for us to do that, we have to show the students that we value them," said Brittney Martin, a Freedom Prep English Language Arts teacher. "If someone is not that kind of teacher, they aren't here."

Freedom Prep Academy serves about 270 middle school students in grades 6-8, and this fall is expanding to a K-10 school. Students have a high level of success at Freedom Prep, which was also a SCORE Prize finalist in 2013. The school has narrowed the TCAP performance gap between low-income students and their higher income peers by 10.8 points in math and 9.9 points in science since 2012. TVAAS three-year math growth is also strong.

"What we've noticed through the data is that the longer that a child is at Freedom Prep, the more gains that they are making," Roblin Webb, the school's founder and chief executive officer, said in a SCORE video interview.

A vigorous weekly teacher coaching cycle brings expert educators into classrooms to observe, provide written feedback, and conduct coaching sessions with instructors. This cycle sometimes includes video analysis – administrators record about 15 minutes of teacher instruction each week, then meet individually with teachers within 48 hours to review the footage and identify strengths and areas needing refinement. Administrators are back in the classrooms within that same week for a shorter observation to check on implementation. Last year, this cycle was repeated on a weekly basis until January, when it shifted to a schedule of alternating weeks. Feedback was provided by content-specific coaches – two assistant heads of middle school, one specializing in STEM subjects and the other in literacy.

With this high level of feedback, coaching can take the form of fine-tuning. For example, Ms. Martin said she worked on using language more economically to allow students to do more heavy lifting during lessons.

"As an English teacher, we tend to talk a lot," said Ms. Martin. "Now I give them the information and then I back off. My students learn best from hearing each other."

Administrators also support teachers by being present in hallways during class time for immediate student interventions. Students who aren't invested in coursework can be directed by teachers to the hall, where they'll be speaking with a dean within a minute or two. The right conversation can have the student back in class soon after, ready to engage.



Freedom Preparatory Academy: Strategies for Students

1. INDIVIDUALIZED, INTENTIONAL COACHING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS
2. WEEKLY OR BIWEEKLY CLASSROOM OBSERVATION OF TEACHING FOLLOWED BY WRITTEN FEEDBACK, COACHING SESSIONS
3. TEACHING FEEDBACK PROVIDED BY CONTENT-SPECIFIC COACHES



Hillsboro Delivers Holistic, Individualized Instruction

No one is teaching to the middle at Hillsboro Elementary/Middle School, winner of the 2014 middle school SCORE Prize.

Core academic courses are levelled – in each middle school grade, as many as five different levels of rigor are offered in separate classes. A flexible, creative master schedule provides extra time for students needing subject area help, while making available a diverse array of related arts courses ranging from yoga to theater makeup. Placements are fluid, not permanent, and revised quarterly.

"We have a philosophy to meet every child where they are in every subject and every standard," said Principal Kari Miller. "We manipulate our schedule around the needs of kids."

Highly differentiated instruction, as well as arts integration, has delivered outstanding academic progress for the school in Leiper's Fork. Hillsboro students score well above statewide averages on TCAP assessments, and the school posts strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth, particularly in math.

In addition, Hillsboro has done significant work to narrow achievement gaps. The gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers has narrowed across all subjects. Hillsboro is a Title I school, and serves a growing population of economically disadvantaged students. Hillsboro, part of Williamson County Schools, serves about 300 students in grades 6-8, in addition to kids in grades K-5.

The introduction of levelled academic courses several years ago played a major role in Hillsboro's strong academic performance. There are different numbers of levels in different grades, depending on student number and need, but five levels is typical. The different levels are referred to by the names of Ivy League colleges, like Oxford, Yale and Brown. Class sizes are smaller at lower levels.

Academic data guides the formation of the levels, delivering the right amount of rigor for each student. Scheduling also accommodates students needing placements in different levels for different subjects. With this broad levelling in place, differentiation within classrooms becomes a matter of fine-tuning.

Students receive their schedules and locker assignments at an ice cream social the day before each new school year begins. Level placements are reconsidered about a month into the school year, after first assessments, and parents are invited to school at that time to review data points and understand placement rationale. Chris MacDonald, an English Language Arts teacher who helps create the schedules, said most parents are happy with the process. The few complaints usually stem from social concerns.

"It's never about intelligence. It's about missing skills," said Mr. MacDonald. "Once they see we really have their kids' best interests in mind, they are happy. We have a high rate of success."

Hillsboro provides another dimension of creative scheduling through its intervention and arts offerings. Students choose between several options called "Majors," including band, choir, visual arts, and theater. Another block is devoted to either enrichment or academic intervention. Intervention is based on student needs, and delivers extra time for subject area help and work with learning coaches. Enrichment is delivered through "Minors," a diverse array of courses offered on a quarterly basis.

This format allows the school to offer a highly unusual, diverse array of learning opportunities. Students meet – and often choose to exceed – state requirements for computer and physical education, with options for advanced computer work and interest-based PE classes like Zumba. Kids in a "Build" class construct catapults from donated materials, and a "Future Teachers" class gives middle schoolers the opportunity to consider a career in education and interact with K-3 classrooms.

"Middle school is a time to try something you may be a little bit scared of," said K-8 Arts Team Leader Elizabeth Pittsley, who schedules the Minors options. "It's not a big commitment. It's nine weeks. We try to encourage them to try new things."

Scheduling all this is no small task. School staff take multiple perspectives on each child as they consider the intervention/enrichment block. Academic data and formative assessments are core considerations. Input is gathered from teachers and literacy coaches.

An incentive for students is built into the process – less time required for intervention means more time for electives. And when students need all the intervention time the school can offer, teachers and literacy coaches still work to find a way to fit in both needed interventions and brain-expanding electives.

"Some kids come to school for those elective classes," Ms. Pittsley said. "Middle school is when you're figuring out who you are, and it's the first time you're making some of your own choices. It empowers them to take charge of their education."

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"We have a philosophy to meet every child where they are in every subject and every standard," said Principal Kari Miller. "We manipulate our schedule around the needs of kids."



Creating this system involves more than making a schedule. Buy-in is essential, from everyone involved. When the diverse array of Minor classes was first offered, there were already staff members at the school who wanted to teach more arts and physical education classes. Teachers are extended a measure of freedom in what they choose to offer. This invigorates the teachers, which in turn spreads to the students. Funding is also crucial. If a promising class involves teaching classic strategy techniques through board games, or requires special cosmetics for a theater make-up class, it's important to have a budget in place.

Building student schedules at Hillsboro is a time-consuming process. No computer program can handle the many inputs determining appropriate academic level placements or best use of intervention and enrichment time. But the pay-off is huge, delivering a holistic, individualized experience for students.

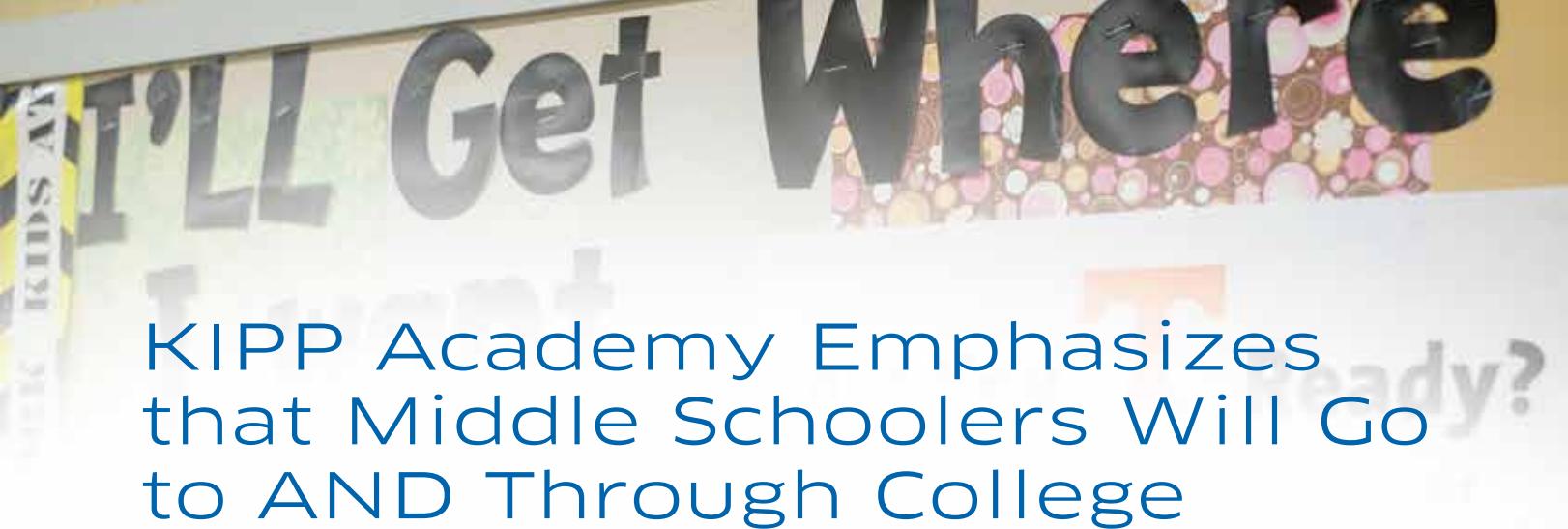
Hunter Jones, an eighth-grader who is about to move on to high school after nine years at Hillsboro, can vouch for the interplay between rigorous academic courses and related arts. In Hunter's case, the discipline and dedication required by band performance taught him how to work hard in other classes. He feels well prepared for high school, and has already earned a high school credit from his work in an elective "Minor" class he took – Spanish.

"It's something special and different from your average school," Hunter said.



Hillsboro Elementary/Middle: Strategies for Students

1. TAILORED INSTRUCTION THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS BASED UPON DATA
2. FLUID PLACEMENT OF STUDENTS INTO LEVELS AND REGULAR REASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PROGRESS TO KEEP THEM ON THE RIGHT TRACK
3. INNOVATIVE "MAJOR/MINOR PROGRAM" COMBINING ELECTIVES WITH ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT AND INTERVENTION



KIPP Academy Emphasizes that Middle Schoolers Will Go to AND Through College

Sewanee. Vanderbilt. Georgetown.

The homeroom names at KIPP Academy Nashville, a SCORE Prize finalist school, have a familiar ring to them.

Howard. Belmont. Georgia Tech.

The names were carefully chosen to represent schools with high rates of college completion for Hispanic and black students. Some of these schools are familiar and close to home for Nashville students. Others are schools some kids have never heard of.

Davidson. Tennessee Tech. Montevallo.

KIPP Academy's 250 students are in middle school. But every day, the focus is college. Not just getting into college, but completing it successfully.

"We talk about going through college, not going to college," said School Leader Laura Miguez Howarth. "Our expectation is that you will complete college. From Day 1, this is a real possibility, and everything we do is in service to that goal."

The college-focused culture at KIPP does prepare students to succeed in college. More immediately, they succeed in middle school. While students enter the school falling, on average, two or three grade levels behind on state tests, teachers help them progress quickly. KIPP students score near or above state averages on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), with 64 percent of KIPP students proficient or advanced in math compared to 46 percent statewide. The school posted strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth in math, reading, and science. From 2012 to 2014, KIPP Academy narrowed the achievement gap between low-income and higher income students in reading, math, and science.

KIPP Academy, a charter school, is part of a national network of 162 KIPP schools. In Nashville, KIPP has expanded in the last few years to open schools that will ultimately serve students in grades kindergarten through 12. Students work hard at KIPP and follow an extended school calendar. The school day begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. most days, though students are dismissed at 2 p.m. one day each week to give teachers time for collaboration and professional development. Students are also in school for two additional weeks in July.

Most KIPP students will be the first in their families to attend college, and more than 90 percent of the school's students are considered economically disadvantaged. To convince students to believe higher education is possible, the school has them thinking about college every moment of the school day.

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The strong focus on academics is paired with information about specific targets students need to reach for college to be a possibility. Posters throughout the school list the colleges students qualify for with various ACT scores and grade point average (GPA) levels. Students learn that they must earn a 21 on the ACT to earn a HOPE scholarship, and that a GPA of 3.0 or higher will open important doors. Each student has individualized growth targets set with immediate, tiered goals. Initially students may push hard to climb from the tenth percentile to the eleventh. Over time, these achievements add up.

Students are taught to adopt habits that will be essential in college. They learn how to keep an agenda, and are taught to fold a paper in half and take notes in class using the Cornell method. Students know they do homework every night in middle school because they'll need to study every night in college, whether they have homework or not.

"We build systems that support good habits, and then invest the students," said Ms. Howarth. Repeated practice and explaining why these tools are used is important to helping students develop the habits they will need for college, she says.

KIPP Academy also invests families. Enrollment meetings begin with staff telling parents that it is the school's mission for their child to graduate from college. One of the first documents introduced to new students and their parents is the C3, the Commitment to College Completion, an outline of school policies and values that will ensure students succeed at KIPP and prepare for college. KIPP also holds financial literacy seminars for parents, introducing families to 529 college savings plans that can be started right away.

"Our kids are going to change their families and their communities forever because they'll be able to say, 'How do I navigate this process for my younger sibling? How do I navigate this process for my cousin?' Ms. Howarth said. "They're changing the lives of many, many others. That's what changes communities."

Middle school is not too early for the college focus, according to LaTrya Gordon, a KIPP alum. Ms. Gordon was part of KIPP Academy's first graduating class of eighth graders in 2009. She graduated from her zoned public high school in 2013 and is now a sophomore at Belmont University. Without the college mindset she adopted at KIPP, Ms. Gordon says, college simply would not have been on her radar. She is a first-generation college student. Her peers in high school didn't talk about going to college – their attention focused less on academics and more on sports and the latest falling out among students.

"KIPP helped me develop the mindset that I can and I will go to college. If I didn't have that mindset, I would have gotten lost. It's what helped me pull through and help me overcome some of the tough times," Ms. Gordon said.

Now, Ms. Gordon is literally going places she's never been before. This summer she'll study abroad in Turkey and get a head start on her junior year by earning nine credits overseas.

KIPP Academy gave her the tools she needed to succeed back when she was in middle school. But the support didn't end there. KIPP Through College (KTC), a program for KIPP alumni, provides advisers to help students successfully complete high school, prepare for college entry, and finish degrees. Ms. Gordon said KTC advisers have attended financial aid meetings with her family, helped her organize study sessions, and assisted with financial planning for her upcoming study abroad trip.

"I've been supported in every way possible," Ms. Gordon said. "They're not going to hold my hand, but they're going to hold me accountable and be right with me every step of the way."



KIPP Academy: Strategies for Students

1. HELPING FAMILIES UNDERSTAND, NAVIGATE COLLEGE-GOING PROCESS
2. ENSURING STUDENTS KNOW GRADES, TEST SCORES NEEDED FOR COLLEGES
3. SETTING GOALS INDIVIDUALLY FOR SHORT-TERM GROWTH, LONG-TERM COLLEGE TRACK
4. SUPPORTING ALUMNI THROUGH KIPP THOUGH COLLEGE



HIGH SCHOOLS



Covington High Looks Beyond School Walls for College and Career Readiness

Three out of four Covington High School graduates go on to a two- or four-year college after high school. That's an impressive achievement, exceeding the statewide average.

But flip this point of pride upside-down, and for Principal Marcus Heaston, a challenge is revealed. What happens to the other kids?

2014 SCORE Prize winner Covington High School delivers results for every student, whether that means pairing qualifying kids with funds for college or paving direct pathways from high school to high-quality jobs.

"If we're operating as a high-level high school, we need to make sure kids truly are college- and career-ready," said Mr. Heaston. "We can end a generation of poverty if we do this the right way."

CHS serves 750 students in grades 9-12 in Covington, a small town northeast of Memphis. About 72 percent of CHS students are economically disadvantaged. The school has achieved strong three-year TVAAS growth, especially in Algebra I and II and English II. CHS has raised proficiency in algebra above the state average while narrowing achievement gaps.

To ensure students are truly ready for college and career, CHS reaches out to the community and collaborates with local businesses and economic development initiatives. The school is enterprise in its preparation of students for available pathways to post-secondary schools and career training. Career and technical education classes help students acquire relevant skills in high school, particularly in the health services and manufacturing industries. A partnership with the Regional Economic Development Institute (REDI) helps students get to college with financial aid applications, and later, tracks college success rates. Expanded dual-credit options are offered, and students are prepared proactively to qualify for Hope Scholarship funds and programs like Tennessee Scholars and Tennessee Promise.

"Every time Governor Haslam comes up with an initiative, we study it. We find a way to really embrace it," Mr. Heaston said.

In the last few years, CHS has found ways to partner with one of Tipton County's largest employers, the Unilever manufacturing plant in Covington. Unilever is a massive manufacturer of consumer goods, and in Covington, Unilever makes ice cream – Popsicles, Klondike and Good Humor bars, and Breyers. Almost 1,000 workers are expected to be on the team there by the time a current, major expansion is complete.

The plant expansion has created a need for more skilled entry-level workers than managers could find locally,

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said Marques Young, a Unilever maintenance manager and liaison to CHS. They've travelled as far away as St. Louis to make hires.

Mr. Young, a CHS alumnus, said discussion of this problem with Mr. Heaston led to a "perfect synergy of time, place, and need." Now CHS and Unilever have partnered in several meaningful ways for students, including through a unique course delivered in collaboration with Dyersburg State Community College (DSCC). The course offers a select group of students a direct pipeline to job opportunities with Unilever after completing high school, delivered through classes that provide skills and certifications desired by other manufacturers as well. Everyone wins, said Mr. Young.

"We're creating a good, solid pipeline of talent," Mr. Heaston said. "Students have every potential career path available, from marketing and accounting to front line supervision. The entire supply chain network has many opportunities. It all comes back to exposure. If you're not exposed to it, you don't know it exists."

The four-module Certified Production Technician course, developed and delivered in full partnership with Unilever, offers students at CHS and other area high schools internship opportunities and experience with equipment used by Unilever. After graduation, students are qualified for jobs offering significantly higher wages and better benefits than a high school diploma alone could earn elsewhere, said Philip Newman, a DSCC instructor of the course.

"We can find jobs for them, because companies are hunting," Mr. Newman said.

The program served 15 students in its first year, and 30 students in its second, the 2014-15 school year. Students qualify for the course based on their scores on the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) exam, a required step for many jobs in the manufacturing sector. This school year, 91 CHS students took the test in hopes of scoring high enough to secure one of the seats in next year's program.

Concrete opportunities with Unilever are bringing out the best in CHS students, according to CHS teacher and instructional coach Cory Concus. Teens recognize that the wages and growth opportunities offered by manufacturers could provide a good living. Knowing the steps needed to get there spurs them to work hard. The best candidates for the program at this point aren't the high achievers planning on college, or the lowest achievers who lack academic skills needed to qualify for the program. The kids being reached are "the very best of the middle," a tough group to target, said Mr. Concus.

"You see an upping of expectations for kids in that middle range, that group that was falling by the wayside," Mr. Concus said. "When a lot of these kids graduate, there's not a lot of hope for them going forward. They want a future just like you want a future for them. When they succeed, people start to really believe in the kids again."

Mr. Concus's hope: Other industries adopt this model. Students benefit from attainable, rewarding goals, and employers benefit from hiring trained, proven workers. And in the long run, West Tennessee develops a high-skilled workforce drawing more employers to the area.

"I hope other industries see this and think that it's a good, repeatable idea. This kind of thing works," Mr. Concus said.

Fighting poverty, rebuilding the middle class – all in a day's work at Covington High.



Covington High School: Strategies for Students

1. INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PREPARING STUDENTS BOTH FOR COLLEGE AND THE WORKFORCE
2. PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL INDUSTRY AND HIGHER EDUCATION TO OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGH-PAYING JOBS AFTER GRADUATION
3. ARRAY OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION COURSES FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS
4. RAISING EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS ACROSS THE BOARD TO HELP TRANSFORM THE COMMUNITY

Teachers Collaborate Across Disciplines at MLK

How many drops of water can fit on the face side of a penny?

It's a tough question. Even if you can assume that all drops are made with a common, measurable dropper, there's a lot involved. Cohesion between water molecules allows for surface tension, creating a bubble that holds more water than you might expect. Several perspectives are required for complete understanding.

Students at SCORE Prize high school finalist Martin Luther King Jr. High School (MLK) answer this question – and many others – with collaborative instruction from teachers in multiple departments. In this case, math and science teachers help students use their knowledge of the properties of water to plot outcomes on a graph and study the resulting curves. It's the kind of interdisciplinary work that helps students translate academic concepts to the real world, said Stacey Turner, Science Department chair at MLK.

"When students see things across several classes in different disciplines, it brings them insight," said Ms. Turner. "Some teachers only teach their curriculum. For the bulk of us, I think we're trying to get past that. We don't teach to the test here."

Teacher collaboration and interdisciplinary study underpin daily work at MLK, an academic magnet school in Nashville. These practices deliver real-world preparation for students and help draw significant academic gains from kids who are already strong performers.

MLK has about 800 students in the high school, as well as students, in grades seven and eight. Academically, students represent the top 10 to 15 percent of Metro Nashville Public Schools – admission requirements include maintenance of at least a "B" average and TCAP scores that are advanced or proficient. Once students are accepted, study is rigorous. High academic expectations must be met, including advanced math and science courses for all high school students.

MLK has achieved outstanding outcomes. The school has a graduation rate of 100 percent, and all students pursue post-secondary study immediately after high school. End-of-course assessment scores are well above state average. The school-wide average ACT score is 25.9. Though it can be challenging to deliver high academic gains when students are already top performers, MLK posts strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth, especially in Algebra I and II.

"When you have a student who's already at a high caliber, it's hard to try to lift them to a higher level," Ms. Turner said. "Starting at 799, it's hard to get to 800."

To meet students' unique needs, rigor is incorporated in every classroom, and all material must involve higher-order thinking. MLK offers a robust selection of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Project-based learning experiences are planned every nine weeks for all grades.

Large-scale, multi-department initiatives are a well-loved part of each school year, like a "Diversity Day" event celebrating the more than 50 languages spoken by MLK students. Many school years feature an "All-School Read," a book chosen by a different department each year for all students to read over the summer. In 2014 the entire school read *Enrique's Journey*, a nonfiction account of a boy who travels from Honduras

to the United States to reunite with his mother. When school resumed, English teachers facilitated discussion of the book, and teachers from other departments brought classes to hear speakers from different countries tell their stories. The book was chosen by the World Language Department.

MLK students also have interdisciplinary experiences with the help of community partners. Nashville's PENCIL Foundation provides connections between schools and many local businesses and higher education institutions, including the Tennessee State University Biology Department and Baptist Hospital for MLK. Some MLK students also participate in the School for Science & Math at Vanderbilt University, a four-year high school program providing weekly laboratory experience and instruction from scientists and researchers on the Vanderbilt campus. The program is free and available to a select group of highly qualified MNPS students each year.

Teacher collaboration is an important part of providing MLK's academic opportunities. Teachers work together constantly, utilizing the school's 45-minute lunch periods as well as time outside class – including weekend talks and departmental planning over summer break. Classrooms are clustered by subject area throughout the building, facilitating communication throughout the day.

Departments make use of an MLK policy allowing teachers to use professional development days for selective work off-campus, said Executive Principal Dr. Angela Carr. The English department, for example, has used this time to collaborate in a variety of ways, including collective grading of writing assessments. Teachers can also work together to plan units and grade certain assignments quickly.

"If you stay on campus, you don't always get much work done," Dr. Carr said.

With students across grades 7-12, MLK makes use of its status as its own feeder school. For example, the entire math department meets regularly to work on vertical alignment of curriculum across all grades, adopting common practices for each course to help

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Teachers at Martin Luther King Jr. Magnet can use professional development days for selective work off-campus, says Executive Principal Dr. Angela Carr. The English department has used this time to collaborate in a variety of ways, including collective grading of writing assessments.



students progress smoothly between levels without missing concepts or wasting time.

This summer, educators have finalized plans to extend the middle school grades' team structure to the ninth and tenth grades. This careful adjustment to the master schedule will give grade-level teachers a common planning period for working together, meeting with parents, and helping students, said Dr. Carr.

"We're hoping for great things. We hope that it will have as positive an impact as it has had in the middle school," Dr. Carr said. "We're continuing to work and strive to improve each day."



Martin Luther King Jr. High School: Strategies for Students

1. HIGH EXPECTATION TO HELP THE HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENT POPULATION CONTINUE TO GROW
2. COLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTION FROM TEACHERS IN MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS AND FREQUENT REGULAR TEACHER COLLABORATION WITHIN DEPARTMENTS
3. PROJECT-BASED LEARNING OFFERED FOR ALL GRADES EVERY NINE WEEKS
4. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH TWO UNIVERSITIES TO OFFER SCIENCE AND MATH EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS

All Students Supported Individually at Ravenwood

Grady McGinnity, a senior at SCORE Prize finalist Ravenwood High School in Brentwood, wasn't persuaded to take an advanced placement (AP) class by a teacher or guidance counselor. It was another student.

At the time, Grady was a freshman just learning to navigate his large new high school. An upperclassman connected with him through Ravenwood's Freshman Mentorship Program (FMP). FMP sends mentors to each freshman homeroom on a regular basis. The visits are most concentrated at the beginning of each school year, when freshmen most need the relationship.

Mentors teach traditional pep rally cheers. They introduce the many diverse student organizations available at Ravenwood, which sets a goal for every student to be involved in at least one student group or athletic team. Details like the two-minute class warning bell are explained. Academic planning information and study tips are also shared, and when this information comes from a peer, the impact is outsized. Grady remembers the day a mentor calculated his grade point average (GPA) to demonstrate the importance of grades during the freshman year, and explained the weighting effect of AP classes. The mentor also discussed the benefits of AP exam credits.

"I would not have taken the AP classes otherwise," Grady said. "FMP is probably one of the biggest strengths of the school. It creates a very personalized feeling."

With about 1,900 students in four grades and a 250,000-square-foot school building, there's no question about it: Ravenwood is big. But that doesn't mean students disappear into the crowd. With strategies like FMP and a teacher collaboration effort called Power Mondays, Ravenwood nurtures academic growth by creating an individualized experience for each student.

And students are succeeding at Ravenwood. The school has an AP pass rate of 79 percent, and a high ACT average of 24.5. Ravenwood students score well above statewide averages on all TCAP end of course assessments, and posted strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth in Algebra I and II, English II, and Biology I.

Ravenwood's staff is intentional about forming relationships with students and quickly identifying those in need of additional supports. Special education and content teachers collaborate to meet all learning needs. A hallmark of classrooms throughout the school is student-focused – and often student-led – instruction. These practices are nourished by an innovation-friendly culture that encourages teachers to always find new ways to connect with each student.

Kristi Neuroth, a teacher of AP Human Geography at Ravenwood, says this culture begins at the county level. The superintendent of her school district, Williamson County Schools, sends a weekly email to teachers with reminders to recognize each individual student, to send positive notes home to families, and to always find new ways to reach out. And within Ravenwood, teachers have concrete opportunities to collaborate and push forward with "Power Mondays," a weekly 40-minute block of time for teacher development and teamwork.

"When teachers are treated like professionals and given creative space to dream big in their classrooms, I think that's where the magic happens," Ms. Neuroth said. "It's a part of the culture to remind us not to

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"It's such a part of our culture," said Dr. Pam Vaden. "We get those teachers together and just require a few things. They know where they need to go. You don't have to tell them."



get lost, to look for those things in each kid in our classroom. That comes from the top down and the bottom up."

Power Mondays began at Ravenwood in 2006 with a pilot so successful that the program is now in place at all middle and high schools in the district. Ravenwood Principal Pam Vaden said she keeps her requirements for Power Mondays simple. Teachers meet in small, same-subject teams and are asked to look at student data and determine which kids have grasped the material and need more enriching activities and which kids need additional help. Teachers are also asked to come up with a common assessment for every teacher on the Power Monday team to administer to students every 2½ weeks, and to analyze the results together. Beyond that, teachers are given freedom to use the time as they need.

"It's such a part of our culture," said Dr. Vaden. "We get those teachers together and just require a few things. They know where they need to go. You don't have to tell them."

Teacher collaboration has helped develop individualized instruction techniques used at Ravenwood. For example, Ms. Neuroth worked with another Ravenwood instructor to devise an "interactive notebook" strategy that has since been shared with educators across the county. Students take notes on a class discussion on the right side of a notebook, and personally reflect on the material on the left side. Responses have ranged from artistic and creative to quantitative and analytical. Students are able to approach the material from the angle most meaningful to them, without teachers attempting to design a class full of different assignments.

"A student is much more willing to work through the hard days if they know a teacher cares about them beyond the four walls of their classroom," Ms. Neuroth said. "AP classes can be a huge leap from what they've done before. If they see you care about them and what they're doing, they're willing to do just about anything for you. No one wants to feel like a number when they go to school, ever."



"A student is much more willing to work through the hard days if they know a teacher cares about them beyond the four walls of their classroom."

Ravenwood High School: Strategies for Students

1. PRIORITY ON INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING TO BRING OUT STUDENTS' BEST WORK
2. FRESHMAN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM
3. "POWER MONDAYS" FOR TEACHER COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION ON STUDENT-FOCUSED STRATEGIES
4. TEAMING BETWEEN CORE CONTENT TEACHERS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS



SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Every Educator Is a Leader at Kingsport City Schools

Five years ago, Christy Free was a middle school math teacher interested in taking on a bit of work beyond the walls of her classroom.

Flash-forward to this summer. Ms. Free has just finished her first year as head principal of John F. Kennedy Elementary School, part of 2014 SCORE Prize-winning district Kingsport City Schools (KCS). She credits her district with shaping her into the leader she didn't know she could be.

"If you had asked me five years ago where I would be now, there are a lot of things I might have said, but not being principal of an elementary school," Ms. Free said. "KCS has dynamic leadership programs that help us continually grow, uniting us all. They set up the opportunities and then step back to let us grow, supporting us along the way."

At KCS, which serves more than 6,600 students in East Tennessee, leadership development and collaborative decision-making are ingrained in work at every level. Superintendent Dr. Lyle Ailshie says the district lives its message that everyone who works with kids – secretaries, central office staff, bus drivers, teachers – is an educator. And every educator is a leader.

"Success breeds success. When you have people who really are empowered and feel they are making a difference, that rubs off on children and builds confidence," said Dr. Ailshie. "We expect everyone who comes in contact with students to exhibit leadership in whatever way is available to them."

Dr. Ailshie believes this philosophy has helped deliver strong academic performance at KCS. The district has delivered significant achievement gap closures between white students and their Hispanic and black peers. KCS posted strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth, and the system-wide ACT average score is 22.

KCS teachers have many opportunities to lead, regardless of whether they're interested in joining the administration. Ms. Free's journey toward principalship began when she joined the KCS Teacher/Leader program five years ago. Designed for outstanding teachers who want more involvement without giving up their teaching roles, the program currently allows about 60 teachers – chosen through an application process – to meet regularly and tackle significant work within schools and system wide. Participants often work on district-wide curriculum and help plan supports for teachers, while also serving as model educators within their schools.

"Teacher leaders are typically very effective in the classroom because of the constant professional learning that takes place," Ms. Free said. "We encourage each other to continue to grow, so the learning never stops."

After two years in the Teacher/Leader program, Ms. Free was hired as one of the district's eleven associate principals. The KCS associate principal program allows educators with a strong interest and aptitude for administration to get a complete sense of the job, while providing the district with an outstanding pipeline for school leaders.

KCS has one associate principal in place at each elementary and middle school. Program participants receive expert mentorship from KCS principals, meet regularly in their own collaborative, and form close relationships that facilitate synergistic work after the program's completion.

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"Success breeds success. When you have people who really are empowered and feel they are making a difference, that rubs off on children and builds confidence," said Dr. Lyle Ailshie. "We expect everyone who comes in contact with students to exhibit leadership in whatever way is available to them."



"We're able to come together as educators, all with different strengths. As we develop, we're never working alone," Ms. Free said. "I didn't expect to be a principal. My mind started shifting ... when I had that opportunity provided to me to experience it, to find out that I do like it and I can do it."

Associate principals experience as many components of principalship as possible – including management of curriculum and instruction, professional learning, test coordination, and parent and community relations. The positions are term-limited and maintain teacher-level salaries. Associate principals must complete an administrative graduate program during their first three-year term; if this is accomplished, one additional three-year term is an option.

Associate principals are top choices to lead district initiatives and often maintain system-side responsibilities. For example, associate principals prepare the district's regular report to the school board.

"They really jump at every opportunity to show the types of things they can do," said Dr. Ailshie.

All but three of the district's current principals were hired from the associate principal pipeline. Assistant Superintendent Dory Creech, who worked as an associate principal 10 years ago, said the program's effectiveness has created a surplus of outstanding, highly qualified candidates for each principal opening.

"It's great to have that problem," Ms. Creech said.

Leadership at KCS extends well beyond the principal's office. A distributed leadership model builds collaboration and empowerment into as many processes as possible. Key decisions about school management are made by school leadership teams, which must include at least one parent and at least one support staff member. Many system-wide plans are made by a district leadership team that includes a rotating group of principals, central office staff, associate principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders. In all cases, decisions are transparent, and not made from the top down.



"I want to make sure that we're modeling the things we want to see in our schools. It's really a collaborative approach," said Dr. Ailshie. "You can't just talk about empowering people. When someone wants to do something to show what they can do, we try to find ways to make that happen."



Kingsport City Schools: Strategies for Students

1. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP MODEL TO FOSTER COLLABORATION AT EVERY LEVEL
2. TEACHER/LEADER PROGRAM TO OFFER TEACHERS SIGNIFICANT LEADERSHIP WORK WHILE STAYING IN THE CLASSROOM
3. ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL PROGRAM TO PROVIDE BROAD LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND CREATE A PRINCIPAL PIPELINE



Maryville City Schools Delivers Technology Access at a Massive Scale

As eighth-grade students arrive in Scotty Hicks' classroom at Maryville Junior High, they each pick up an assigned laptop and move to their desks.

They know the routine. Students log into the online learning management system, find their daily work, and get to it. They see notes to go over during the lesson, and a type of activity to complete. When the lesson begins, kids still have their laptops in front of them. They can submit work on paper or digitally – their choice.

Meanwhile, a stack of social studies textbooks sits in the classroom, unused. The 2014-2015 school year would normally have seen the adoption of new social studies textbooks, but Mr. Hicks is working with new laptops instead of books. He kept a classroom set around as a sort of Plan B, in case mechanical glitches arose. But they haven't been cracked open all year.

"Now we have the whole Internet as a resource," Mr. Hicks said. "We don't just cover material. We really focus on learning. That's what this digital world gives to us – more ways to intervene and respond."

Mr. Hicks is part of the opening phase of iReach, a massive district-wide effort at SCORE Prize Finalist district Maryville City Schools (MCS) to place an electronic device in the hands of every student. This year, 30 percent of MCS staff teach in classrooms with 1:1 student-to-device ratios. Next year, all students in grades PreK-3 will have classroom iPads, and students in grades 4-12 will receive laptops to use at school and take home each afternoon.

Deployment of technology at this scale is the best way to shape twenty-first century learners and deliver limitless learning opportunities, according to MCS Director of Schools Dr. Mike Winstead.

"The least amount of technology that kids encounter in their days is in school," Dr. Winstead said. "Instead of making them conform to our world, let's change the classroom to conform to theirs."

MCS, which won the 2011 SCORE Prize and has been a finalist twice before, is already a high academic performer with a statewide reputation for strong schools and community support. The district of over 5,000 students has an average ACT score of 23.6 and an AP exam pass rate of 80 percent. MCS is a district committed to continual improvement, as demonstrated by continued strong three-year TVAAS growth, particularly in math and Algebra I and II.

Optimizing the use of technology for instruction is one MCS strategy to continue moving from good to great,

Dr. Winstead said. The mission has built strong support among district employees and local stakeholders alike.

"We have a culture of adaptation and innovation and risk-taking," Dr. Winstead said. "Once we could show that this would better prepare kids for college and career, that it would help teachers do better work, that's all it took. We just had to articulate that."

A district-wide survey of teachers found that 99 percent of teachers say they're willing to make the digital leap, provided they have support. And in the community, the Blount Partnership Chamber of Commerce is working with MCS and offices that only use their networks during business hours to provide a network of free wireless Internet hotspots. Organizers aim for every child to have a free hotspot within a block from home.

The magnitude of change promised by iReach can be witnessed in Mr. Hicks's classroom. Mr. Hicks has worked with colleague Rob Kuban to create an online framework of content – a sort of digital workbook – that kids can access anytime, anywhere. The new Tennessee state standards for eighth-grade social studies are broken up by unit, and for each unit, the teachers have created lessons. Students work at their own pace. Supplemental resources are provided for those who understand quickly and need enrichment, like more primary sources to read and videos to view. More materials are added constantly.

The online system provides immediate feedback on assessments, and Mr. Hicks is able to measure comprehension of specific standards. With more complete data to analyze, Mr. Hicks can verify that more students are mastering standards than in previous years. For those who need extra help, Mr. Hicks can locate specific weaknesses quickly.

"Students already live in such a digital world," Mr. Hicks said. "They're a lot less bored, a lot more engaged, because they love working through the bugs of technology. They love the interactive and the entertaining value of it. That's when I realized we were really onto something, when I saw the kids

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more engaged in the lessons."

Problems with the technology have not been as distracting as feared, so Mr. Hicks has instead spent his hours thinking about ways to overcome steep and varying digital learning curves and generate quality digital content.

The early adoption program is part of the district's large-scale professional development effort this year. Early adopters were chosen selectively both to model the power of the technology and to serve as a resource next year, and their classrooms have been visited regularly by other staff members. MCS has taken a differentiated approach to preparing educators for the roll-out, starting with needs assessments. Teachers have choices in training and the model lessons they'd like to learn more about.

"You have such a range of where teachers are with comfort, expertise, and knowledge with technology," Dr. Winstead said. "That's true with all things, including differentiation and management. But it's especially true with technology. The one-size-fits-all approach was not going to work."

As teachers and administrators work hard to prepare for device deployment in July, and as community members continue to build local WiFi networks, there's one group of individuals eager for the iReach initiative to spread district-wide: Students. Karen Van Son, parent of three MCS students and the parent representative for iReach at Maryville Junior High School, says her ninth-grade son has already benefited from recorded science lessons online to review while studying, as well as online calendars of assignments and requirements.

"My son is extremely into technology," Ms. Van Son said. "That's how they think. This is how they study."



Maryville City Schools: Strategies for Students

1. INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY INTO DAILY INSTRUCTION IN A WAY THAT RESONATES WITH AND ENGAGES STUDENTS
2. WORKING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO MAKE TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL STUDENTS
3. TAKING A THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO THE TECHNOLOGY ROLLOUT WITH PILOT PROJECTS AND CUSTOMIZED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

WCS Supports Schools in Well-Rounded Approach to Achieving Excellence

Ever tried to change a tire without stopping the car?

For Eric Lifsey, a principal in Williamson County Schools (WCS), that's what it can feel like to implement even the most helpful of new practices.

"You can't stop school while you institute a change," said Dr. Lifsey. "Being able to learn from others makes it a lot easier."

High-performing Williamson County Schools, a district finalist for the 2014 SCORE Prize, is renowned for helping schools collaborate, so educators can learn from and replicate what is working elsewhere in the district. This collaborative culture also fosters consistency, helping all schools stay true to a focused, community-developed vision statement. The result is a district with common expectations and exceptional supports for schools driving forward.

Serving 36,000 students in Middle Tennessee, WCS brims with success stories. The district posted strong three-year marks on TVAAS growth in math and Algebra I and II. Students perform well on ACT tests, scoring an average of 23.1, and the AP exam pass rate is 70 percent.

District-wide, WCS has a communicative culture. School-level innovations are frequently scaled up and adopted at other schools. The district often facilitates organic sharing of ideas by providing space for professionals to collaborate. For example, WCS's 41 principals spend one full day together each month in professional development, devoting half that time to small professional learning communities (PLCs) with four to six members. The principals in these groups maintain a cycle of visiting one another's schools and discussing their observations. The program started as a one-year pilot, but it was so successful that it will continue next year.

"You need time within the day and schedule to have this kind of collaboration," Dr. Lifsey said. "There's a big difference between having a conversation and actually being able to go and see things happening. We've all been able to pick ideas and scale them up as we need in our buildings."

The program itself is actually a scaling up of an informal practice started a few years ago by the district's middle schools, according to Dr. Lifsey. He considers the practice to have been a key to WCS middle schools' success. The district heard about the success and brought it to others.

The principal PLCs build relationships that pay off in further collaboration, said Marilyn Webb, an elementary school principal in WCS. Her PLC included individuals new to WCS, and the positive relationships built made them feel comfortable reaching out with questions between sessions.

"We do this kind of thing all the time," Dr. Webb said. "It's just part of the culture in our county. We are very competitive, but I think we are more competitive as a county than with each other."

THE S CORE PRIZE

Rising to the Challenge

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Consistency and collaboration have made it possible for each WCS school to operate with great fidelity to the district's vision statement, adopted in 2010 after an intentional dialogue with stakeholders throughout the community: "Williamson County Schools will become a district recognized nationally for students who excel in academics, the arts, and athletics."

This statement defines the work of everyone in the district, starting with academics, said Tim Gaddis, assistant superintendent for teaching, learning and assessment (TLA). WCS prioritizes classroom time, which Mr. Gaddis calls the district's most important resource. There are no PA announcements interrupting classes, and no movies shown. Teachers and administrators hold one another accountable for bell-to-bell instruction.

Another high priority is rigor, across all achievement levels. This is a professional development focus – the district has brought in national consultants to speak with educators on the topic. At the central office, data is analyzed across all quintiles, and growth within each quintile is tracked. More growth is achieved in the lower quintiles, but it's "a heavier lift" to keep students growing once they reach the top quintile, Mr. Gaddis said.

"We are really focusing heavy attention on that," said Mr. Gaddis. "What we have to do is make sure that they aren't just staying where they are, but actually making progress."

The district is also working to fully embrace RTI2 processes. Starting with the 2015-16 school year, WCS will be a K-12 RTI district. WCS gives schools control over how RTI is managed, and creative responses are shared through school leader collaboration. The district is considering a shuffle of principal PLCs next year that would create PLCs composed of multiple school levels, so high school principals can learn from elementary and middle schools that have had RTI processes in place for a year or two.

In addition to excellence in academics, WCS pro-

vides extensive fine arts offerings to students. Increasingly, the district is moving to define arts excellence to include meaningful arts opportunities for as many students as possible, in addition to the national performance awards earned by area schools. Arts program enrollment is on the rise, exceeding 5,000 students in the last school year. All K-5 students receive art and music education taught by content specialists, and all middle school students have arts courses available. The district delivers a wide variety of courses for high school students to choose from when meeting Tennessee fine arts graduation requirements.

Taking arts access further, a new program at Ravenwood High aims to correct the lack of arts inclusion for kids with special needs by pairing top band students with special education peers. If successful, the program could become another WCS scale-up success story.

The district is also working to find more ways to connect the arts with the rest of the curriculum, said WCS Fine Arts Curriculum Specialist Melissa Dufrechou. Scoping sequences for every content area are currently being built to help drive instruction and find correlations between fine arts and academic standards. For example, social studies standards pertaining to the roaring twenties are connected with the development of jazz in music and abstract art during the Harlem Renaissance. The district is working on professional development to share this work with teachers.

For the last two years, WCS has promoted community awareness of arts programming through the WCS Fine Arts Festival, a full-day event showcasing more than 1,000 students in grades K-12. Performances and visual arts displays filled stages and meeting rooms in an enormous event venue, the Factory at Franklin, drawing thousands of community members to see the schools shine.

"It really does keep arts education in the spotlight in the community," said Ms. Dufrechou. "You don't want to become complacent in reminding people."

At WCS, a district constantly moving forward, complacency doesn't appear to be an option.



Williamson County Schools: Strategies for Students

1. AUTONOMY AND FLEXIBILITY TO INNOVATE AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL AND REGULAR COLLABORATION BY SCHOOL LEADERS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES
2. "BELL TO BELL INSTRUCTION" TO MINIMIZE CLASSROOM INTERRUPTIONS, MAXIMIZE STUDENT FOCUS ON LEARNING
3. COLLABORATIVE VISION DEVELOPED WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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