

# Allegany County Public Schools Pilot School Initiative

## Spotlight Practices Brief

Exploring how to use the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to accelerate improvement and systemic change

Three Stories from Allegany County Public Schools

October 2025

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This Spotlight Practices Brief provides case narratives describing how three schools implemented and piloted collaborative teaming structures, new leadership and teacher roles, and approaches to improving core and tiered instruction. The Brief describes the accomplishments and challenges in each school and is intended to inform district-level planning and implementation of Blueprint policies.

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**Allegany County Public Schools:** Superintendent Jeff Blank, for initiating and supporting the Pilot Initiative; Dr. Wendy Main, as the Blueprint Coordinator and for serving as a thought partner; and Superintendent Michael Martirano, for continuing and expanding the Pilot work as a means of expanding the use of evidence-based best practices across the district.

We also thank Dr. Steven Thompson, Dr. Sarah Welsh, and Jackie Enright, district supervisors who provided technical support to schools in support of their efforts.

**A heartfelt thank you to the educators and leaders at each school**, who agreed to participate, carried out all of the hard work of piloting, testing, and implementing, and who opened the doors of their schools to engage in conversations and documentation of their work.

Cresaptown Elementary School	Braddock Middle School	Fort Hill High School
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## Introduction to the Pilot Initiative and Study Overview

**Rationale.** In the Spring of 2024, Allegany County Public School leadership was considering how to implement and leverage the Blueprint for Maryland’s future. Recognizing that moving too quickly to implement certain Blueprint policies might be problematic, we discussed ways to introduce changes deliberately and in a manner that would allow us to pilot, study, and then expand practices that demonstrated promise. We introduced the idea of inviting three schools to pilot collaborative teaming structures, scheduling changes, new teacher leadership roles, and professional learning to improve core instruction and tiered academic support.

The Pilot School initiative was approved by the Superintendent in April 2024 and three schools (Fort Hill High School, Braddock Middle School, and Cresaptown Elementary school) were invited to submit proposals describing proposed changes and resource needs.

*The Goals of the Pilot Initiative* were to: (1) support schools in their design and implementation of innovative practices and (2) document and learn from schools how they implemented Blueprint policies related to collaborative teaming structures, teacher leadership, school leadership actions, professional development, and tiered systems of support. The multi-year vision is to have each Pilot School continue its work during the 2025-26 school year, and to then use their experience to scale up Blueprint strategies in additional Elementary, Middle, and High schools in the 2026-27 school year.

*Support and Documentation.* In addition to participating in planned district professional development, each school partnered with Brett Lane, Allegany’s Blueprint Strategic Facilitator, to design and implement their proposed initiatives (as detailed in each case narrative). A collaborative research approach was used with each school, to develop a theory of action to guide implementation and then (over the school year) to document how each school went about implementing, adapting, and sustaining the changes that they put into place. Our approach incorporated improvement science protocols (Bryk et al., 2017)<sup>1</sup> and a case narrative research design. An organizing framework, focused on collaborative teaming, leadership, and improving instruction, was used to guide technical assistance and documentation.

Over the 2024-25 school year, the Strategic Facilitator held Strategy Sessions with each school’s leadership team ~5 to 6 times and convened a joint principal meeting for the three principals, in March of 2025. Additionally, a preliminary set of findings and learnings from Pilot School principals was prepared and shared with district leaders and all principals during the April 23, 2025 Combined Council meeting.

### *What did we learn?*

The findings and learnings from this study are shared in this document, through an Executive Summary that highlights emerging best practices, and detailed case narratives for each school. The case narratives provide significant details on what each school implemented, how they did so, and the various challenges that they faced. We invite feedback and conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L.M., Grunow, A.G., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2017). Learning to Improve: How America’s Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better.

## By the Numbers

The following provides demographic data for SY2024-25 and longitudinal academic achievement data for each school, from SY2022-23 to SY2024-25.

**Table 1. Pilot School Enrollment and Demographics**

	All	Enrollment by race/ethnicity <sup>2</sup>				Selected Populations - Percentage	
		Black	White	Hispanic	Multi-Race	Low Income	SWD
District	8113	341	6843	188	635	59.6%	15.9%
Cresaptown Elementary	268	*	235	*	14	61.6%	21.7%
Braddock Middle	536	27	433	13	57	55.6%	13.6%
Fort Hill High	655	29	538	18	62	55.2%	8.9%

The following tables display the percentage of all students scoring proficient on the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) assessments, 2023 to 2025.

**Table 2**

Cresaptown Elementary	ELA All Grades (3-5)			Math All Grades		
	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct
2023	53.3	41.6	5.1	42.4	44.5	13.1
2024	60.9	33.9	5.2	46.6	42.2	11.2
2025	57.7	36.9	5.4	39.2	50.8	10.0

**Table 3**

Braddock Middle	ELA All Grades (6-8)			Math All Grades		
	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct
2023	57.6	36.0	6.4	26.3	45.0	28.7
2024	56.2	35.0	8.8	31.8	46.0	22.2
2025	61.4	31.4	7.2	37.6	42.1	20.3

**Table 4**

Fort Hill High	ELA Grade 10			Algebra 1		
	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct	Percent Proficient (Level 3 or 4)	Level 2 Pct	Level 1 Pct
2023	46.8	46.5	6.7	1.9	40.2	57.9
2024	52.5	38.9	8.6	4.2	53.6	42.2
2025	48.1	43.6	8.3	1.7	65.0	33.3

<sup>2</sup> Data on American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian are not included as none of the Pilot schools had over 10 students in the student group. In 2025, the district reported 14 American Indian or Alaska Native students, 84 Asian students, and less than 10 Native Hawaiian students.

## Executive Summary

The **Blueprint for Maryland's Future** provides districts with the opportunity to use specific policy instruments and additional resources to significantly improve our system of public education. Allegany County leadership asked: how can we leverage this opportunity in our district and for our entire community of students, parents and caregivers, and educators?

Faced with uncertainty regarding what the Blueprint really meant for their district, and a cautious (if not wary) professional staff and community, Allegany County leadership took important steps to introduce changes into their system. Formalizing the *Blueprint Pilot Initiative* was a key first step.

**Overview.** In Spring of 2024, three schools were invited to serve as Pilot Schools to design, implement, and experiment using the policy instruments provided by the Blueprint. Recognizing that implementing newly introduced high quality instructional materials was paramount, the three schools (one Elementary, Middle, and High) explored how to implement collaborative teaming, leverage teacher leaders, revise schedules, and utilize the district's professional learning opportunities. These were new efforts, as most district schools had limited previous experience using collaborative teams (collab time was not scheduled) and did not have school-based structures to improve classroom instruction.

With this as context, the goals of the *Pilot Initiative* were to: (1) use this opportunity to improve core and tiered instruction in the Pilot schools, to the benefit of students; and (2) learn, as a district, what best practices might emerge and how these practices might be scaled up across the district.

Each Pilot School designed and implemented innovative strategies. Each school also faced challenges and modified their improvement efforts.

Questions we asked as we supported and studied each school's experience include:

- What happened and how did schools go about implementing new practices?
- What are some of the emerging best practices that we can learn from and potentially scale up?
- What challenges did the schools face and how can we mitigate these challenges?

## Emerging Best Practices

### During the first year of the Pilot, each school:

- Implemented collaborative teaming structures as a means of improving core and tiered instruction.
- Took deliberate action to improve core instruction, by focusing and strategically coordinating their efforts to improve classroom instruction.
- Cultivated distributed leadership by intentionally building the capacity of teachers and teacher leaders to take on additional responsibilities and ownership of student learning.
- Developed and implemented targeted approaches to providing tiered and student-specific interventions.
- Made strategic adaptations and was guided by leadership with an improvement-mindset; continually asking: How can we get better?

## Learnings and Emerging Best Practices

The emerging best practices are interrelated and best understood as a system of practices, actions, and ways of working that work together in tandem. Implementing one practice without careful attention to others is unlikely to improve instruction and student learning.

### Collaborative Teaming

Each school provided additional collaborative time for teachers and deliberately used teaming practices to support teachers in improving their core instruction and using data to identify student-specific needs. The first challenge faced by each school involved supporting teachers in working together as a team, to be able to use this time effectively. Developing team goals, meeting routines, and a focus for collaborative time involved significant up-front work and should not be overlooked.

While each school faced challenges and there is still room for improvement, leadership in each school stated that collaborative teaming was a crucial ingredient that contributed to teachers' ability to work on and improve core and tiered instruction. Collaborative teaming was essential, as it provided time for teachers to apply professional learning and implement the curriculum and high-quality instructional materials provided by the district. Collaborative teaming increased teachers shared ownership and accountability for student learning and reduced the "silos" of teachers focusing solely on their own students. Collaboration opened up possibilities for the sharing and spread of effective instructional practices among and across teachers.

#### Collaborative Teaming – School Snapshots

Cresaptown Elementary started the year with an additional 60-minute weekly collaborative planning for grade-level teachers, in addition to daily common prep. This structure was modified during the year, shifting to monthly two-and-a-half-hour planning sessions instead of weekly planning.

Braddock Middle scheduled daily 82-minute blocks of time for each grade level team, comprised of 41 minutes for individual prep and 41 minutes for collaboration. Over the course of the school year, grade-level teams developed a schedule and routine for using collaborative time, focusing on students' needs (e.g., Student Support), lesson planning and co-teaching, and planning for students' LAB period (e.g., time allocated for intervention and enrichment). Instructional coaches facilitated one or two collaborative sessions each week, to support teachers in utilizing Unit and Lesson internalization, to develop standards-based instruction.

Fort Hill High School implemented a 6-period schedule that provided English and Math teachers with 45 minutes of collaboration time, in addition to teachers' common planning time. Most teachers also had an additional "Support Period" that provided teachers the flexibility to support individual students, including pushing-in to classrooms and providing credit recovery for certain students. Notably, the Math department used their collab time and support periods to focus on planning for and co-teaching Algebra 1 classrooms.

While each school increased collaborative time for teachers and see the value of collaboration, it is unlikely that any of schools reached the prescribed time allocation of 60 percent classroom and 40 percent collaboration/targeted intervention as called for in Blueprint policy.

## Intentional Practices to improve Instruction

Each school took deliberate action to improve core instruction, by focusing and strategically coordinating their efforts to improve classroom instruction. Two schools utilized a 3-day Summer Institute to provide focused professional development, set instructional expectations, and to provide teachers with dedicated time to apply professional learning to the development of curricular units and lessons. The Summer Institute was an important kickoff to the school year, providing evidence-based professional development, galvanizing a sense of urgency, and providing direction. Each school then used their collaborative time and instructional coaches (or teacher leaders) to support teachers in designing effective instruction. Collaborative time, coaching, modeling instruction, and using school-based learning walks each played key roles in improving classroom instruction.

*What contributed to instructional improvement? When successful, schools:*

- Focused on specific instructional priorities and practices that teachers could directly apply to their lesson planning and delivery of instruction.
- Provided up-front professional development followed by job-embedded time for teachers to work collaboratively on planning instruction and sharing instructional practices.
- Invited teachers to develop and provide professional learning.
- Actively used collaborative time, often guided or facilitated by instructional coaches or teacher leaders, as time for teachers and special educators, to plan lessons together.
- Developed and used school-based Learning Walks based on what teachers are working on and that provides useful information to leaders and teachers.
- Leveraged instructional coaches and teacher leaders who provided coaching, modeled instruction, and often led collaborative team meetings.

### Intentional Practices to Improve Instruction – School Snapshots

Cresaptown Elementary developed a model for instructional improvement using evidence-based professional development that was driven by school-level need and informed by teacher input. Their goals were to implement the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum and improve students' problem solving in math. Building upon their Summer Institute, school-year professional development was job-embedded, occurring on monthly basis during 3-hour collaborative sessions and informed by school-developed Learning Walks and teacher input.

Braddock Middle School aimed to improve the rigor of core instruction in all content areas, so that teachers could effectively use curricular resources in lesson planning and improve the delivery of academically engaging instruction. Equally important was the need to increase student voice. Leveraging the Summer Institute, school leadership, Instructional Coaches, and Lead Teachers worked with each grade-level to develop routines for using their collaborative and individual prep time to improve instruction. Unit Internalization processes and iReady resources were introduced to, and used by, teachers with increased sophistication over the school year.

Fort Hill High School set instructional priorities in English and Math and ultimately found the most success in Math. The Math team shifted the content of Collab time to focus on designing strong Tier 1 Algebra instruction and providing customized in-class support to students in Algebra classrooms.

## Building Teacher and Leadership Capacity

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future emphasizes the importance of teacher leadership, through incentives for teachers to become Nationally Board Certified (NBC) and requirements that districts establish Level 4, Lead Teachers. However, there remains ambiguity regarding how districts will merge existing positions (such as instructional coaches and district specialists) with the new roles and responsibilities of NBC and Lead Teachers.

Through the *Pilot Initiative*, each school cultivated *distributed leadership* by intentionally building the capacity of teachers and teacher leaders to take on additional responsibilities and ownership of student learning. One school utilized a mix of school-based instructional coaches and “60/40” Lead Teachers to provide instructional leadership. One school invited two expert teachers to work with leadership to develop school-wide professional development and serve as instructional leaders, however, these teachers retained a full teaching load. And one school planned to build internal teacher leadership but ultimately relied on district-level specialists and coaches to provide support.

### Observations and learnings for future deliberation

*School-based and full-time coaches and/or teacher leaders are necessary for a school to implement and sustain instructional improvements.*

The experience of the three Pilot schools highlights how the impact of Collaborative time and Instructional Leaders are closely linked. Collaborative time without stable, school-based instructional leaders may not be as effective as desired. Similarly, placing coaches or teacher leaders in schools without scheduled collaborative time for teachers may limit the ability of instructional leaders to support teachers.

*Principals and school leaders need some type of “team” that they can work with and rely on to think about how to improve instruction, what may need to be improved, and to provide instructional insight. Distributed instructional leadership is crucial.*

Principals in Allegany Public Schools have the skills to serve as instructional leaders. However, past practices may not have provided the time or resources for principals to meet administrative responsibilities and drive instructional improvement. Principals cannot single-handedly manage instructional improvement. One Pilot principal noted that they would not have been able to do the instructional work this year without relying on expert teachers. Instructional coaches and Lead Teachers played a significant role at Braddock Middle. While understanding that resources are limited, it is challenging for schools to maximize the support of itinerant coaches and specialists.

*Building relational trust among leaders, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and professional staff is of the utmost importance, but can be difficult to develop.*

Each school experienced some challenges in increasing the level of trust among instructional leaders and teachers that may be needed, for teachers to be comfortable asking for and receiving instructional feedback. Two of the schools used Learning Walks in different ways, to inform professional development and to encourage teachers to visit each other. Early evidence from two schools suggests that Lead Teachers – professionals who continue to teach students – may have an easier time establishing trust with colleagues. However, instructional coaches are also able to build strong relationships with teachers. Each Pilot school principal spoke about and described ways that they built relational trust, such as listening, providing teachers with autonomy, and soliciting and then using teacher input to inform decision making.

## Providing Student-Specific Academic Support.

Each school developed and implemented targeted approaches to providing tiered and student-specific interventions and support.

A key learning from the Pilot schools is that when school leadership is laser-like focused on improvement, changes can be made that will have a dramatic impact on students' learning. One brief example is shared here, with additional detail provided in each school's narrative.

*MTSS with Fidelity.* During the school year, Braddock Middle School leadership realized that they needed to make a significant modification to how they were using LAB time and when students received Tier 3 interventions. Using data and having the ability to modify schedules, leadership created a Functionally Intensive Teaching (FIT) approach for providing dedicated Tier Three intervention support to targeted students *in addition to* all students having access to LAB class. FIT provides time for students most in need of individualized academic support and serves as time and space for the provision of Tier Three interventions. Previously, these students – those requiring the most support – were being pulled out of LAB class, and thus not receiving Tier Two support.

## Leadership Actions focused on Accelerated Improvement

Each school made strategic adaptations and was guided by leadership with an improvement-mindset; continually asking: How can we get better and what is my role in supporting my staff?

The principals and leaders of the Pilot Schools demonstrated a strong commitment to improving; a willingness to reflect upon what was working, what wasn't and how to improve. Each principal administered multiple surveys asking teachers (and in some cases parents and students) to provide feedback. The following leadership attributes are offered as food for thought. None of the principals did all of these; but these are attributes that the Pilot School principals and leadership collectively exhibited.

### Key Leadership Moves that lead to successful rollout and accelerated improvement

1. **Establish a Clear Instructional Focus:** Leadership designs or develops an instructional strategy or set of instructional practices to directly impact the instructional need that is grounded in research and best practice.
2. **A Vision as a Moral Imperative to Improve:** The principal and school leaders galvanize the energy and focus of the community with a vision.
3. **Make Visible Quick Wins:** Leadership makes visible early wins and impact, which leads to teacher buy-in and motivation.
4. **Infuse Expertise and Research-Based Practices:** Leadership provides an infusion of evidence-based resources and supports, including modeling of instruction and sharing of exemplars, to productively assist teachers in employing the instructional strategies.
5. **Provide Ongoing Guidance and Support:** Leadership creates and uses a continuous and deliberate process for ongoing guidance, support, and assistance to teachers.
6. **Grant Defined Autonomy:** Leadership encourages teacher autonomy within specific expectations for lesson planning, instruction, and outcomes.
7. **Use Data and Measure for Improvement:** Leadership embraces data and measurement processes to identify whether improvement strategies are working and for teachers to regularly assess students' academic progress and to adjust their instruction accordingly.

# Cresaptown Elementary School

## What did the school Aim to Accomplish?

**Context.** Cresaptown Elementary School is a mid-sized K-5 elementary school (~270 students) with 16 full-time K-5 academic teachers, of which nine (9) have over 20 years of experience and six (6) have 5 or less years of experience (2024 Staff Data, MSDE). While identified as a Targeted Support and Intervention (TSI) school in 2023, Cresaptown students' ELA and Math scores have consistently been in the mid- to upper tier of Allegany County's 14 elementary schools. Exhibiting stable leadership and a cohort of teachers eager to grow instructionally, Cresaptown was invited to participate in the Pilot School initiative.

In summer 2024, Principal Llewellyn saw the Pilot initiative as an opportunity to implement a variety of strategies that may not have been available in the past. In previous years, teachers had not been provided with the time to collaborate. And due in part to administrative responsibilities, it was often challenging for administrators to serve as instructional leaders – to support and reinforce the district's instructional expectations. The Pilot Initiative provided Cresaptown Elementary with the opportunity to experiment with teacher collaboration, develop a school-wide approach to instructional improvement, and explore how to accelerate the growth of early-career teachers.

At the beginning of SY24-25, Principal Llewellyn convened a small leadership team, comprised of his assistant principal and two classroom teachers. Together, we established an overarching goal for the Pilot work and a Problem of Practice.

**Goal.** Our overarching goal is to accelerate gains in student achievement and build a collaborative and professional culture for teachers and for students. We aim to fully implement our TSI plan, including district literacy and math initiatives and implement an effective MTSS for students.

**Problem of Practice.** How can we create a culture of professional learning and shared responsibility for improving instruction leading to improved classroom instruction (e.g., implementation of Math and Literacy programs) and an effective MTSS system for all students?

**Drivers** that **if we address and improve**, we hypothesize will improve classroom instruction and create a culture of professional learning and shared responsibility for students' academic performance.

- If we establish teacher and leadership understanding of the Blueprint Plan for Maryland and how it supports our work at Cresaptown...
- If we generate collective responsibility among all teachers for improving instruction...
- If we provide time for and improve how teachers engage in collaborative planning focused on improving the rigor and consistency of content area instruction...
- If we develop effective routines for using assessment data, to identify the skills and concepts that students need support with AND then provide students with targeted interventions...

**Then** our core and tiered instruction will improve, leading to an increased percentage and numbers of students on grade-level or above in reading and math and prepared to enter middle school on track to meet CCR standards.

## Initial Design Components

In summer 2024 and at the beginning of SY24-25, the leadership team worked out the changes that they planned to make, as a general “plan” for implementing Pilot activities.

Cresaptown Elementary’s plan involved:

1. **Engaging teachers in deliberate and collaborative professional learning opportunities** prior to start of school and throughout the school year. This strategy included the following actions:
  - Convening a Summer Institute focused on English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. ELA professional learning focused on the implementation of Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) and how to embed text-dependent questions in lessons. Math professional development focused on supporting students’ problem solving.
  - The planned use of full-time reading and math specialists to lead professional development and provide school-based coaching.
  - Designating two “60/40” teachers to work with administrators and co-develop professional learning for teachers across grade-levels.
2. **Establishing and implementing a new 60-minute collaborative planning time for grade-level teachers**, to be held once per week as provided by the hiring of two “Blueprint” teachers. An informal “goal” of the principal was to try to ensure that all teachers had at least 20 percent collaborative planning during the school year.
  - **Structure.** Two teachers were hired as “Blueprint Teachers” to provide coverage so that classroom teachers could participate in weekly grade-level collaborative meetings, in addition to teachers daily common preparation.
  - **Content.** The additional collaborative planning was designed to provide teachers with time to implement new literacy and math curriculum and pedagogy and use assessment data to inform Tier 1 instructional practices.
3. **Establishing an MTSS system/team** to quickly identify students’ needs and provide targeted interventions and support; this work involves designing a flexible schedule, including having newly hired teachers providing reading and math interventions, and use of new diagnostic assessments.
  - Use of online Tutoring resources with a subset of students, to test out the efficacy of the newly adopted Tutoring program.

**Moving from Planning to Implementation.** The following section describes how Cresaptown Elementary went about implementing its plan.

*Strategic implementation requires adaptation and modification, as challenges emerge and as the implementors (leaders and teachers) use data—their lived experience and information—to learn and make strategic adjustments. This is especially important as schools implement and “pilot” new strategies and ways of working. District and school leaders are invited to learn from Cresaptown Elementary’s experience to consider how similar Blueprint strategies might be implemented across the district.*

## What Happened? How were the changes implemented?

During the first three months of the school year, school leadership modified each Design Component in important and meaningful ways. Each modification—including the rationale for the change and the end result—is described here, to illustrate the strategic thinking of school leaders and to support other school leaders and teachers who may implement similar changes.

### Leadership

#### *Shift #1: Formalizing a broader Leadership Team focused on Instructional Improvement.*

Within the first few weeks of the school year, Principal Llewellyn set a goal of establishing an Instructional Leadership Team that included the two 60/40 teachers (a 2nd grade and 4th grade teacher), the Assistant Principal, and district coaches/specialists (as available). The Leadership Team met semi-regularly during the school year to establish and implement the instructional focus of the school. Key activities included developing professional development, designing and organizing instructional walkthroughs, reviewing walkthrough data, and organizing the use of collaborative planning.

**Rationale.** Principal Llewellyn recognized that being a “Blueprint Principal” involved a shift in roles and responsibilities. We started to ask questions based on the goal and problem of practice that we articulated prior to the school year, thinking about what it means to be an instructional leader.

- How can the principal lead instructional improvement efforts while still running the school?
- What are the things that need to be in place to improve instruction across the school?
- How are we going to build shared responsibility and ownership for instructional improvement?

Exploring these and many other questions highlighted the importance and need to expand leadership beyond administration; to build upon the expertise of teachers and to invite shared responsibility for instructional improvement.

#### **Result: Challenges and Implications**

Members of the Instructional Leadership Team noted the value of meeting together and providing instructional guidance. Leadership also shared a number of challenges that the school plans to address. These challenges are not unique to Cresaptown and are shared here as issues for consideration.

- **The two 60/40 teachers retained a full teaching load and did not have formal (built in) time to serve on a Leadership Team.** As a result, the 60/40 teachers had some time to meet with the principal (as a leadership team), but little to no leadership opportunities such as coaching or facilitating/leading grade-level team meetings, and other roles that instructional leaders might have.
- **District support included a Math Specialist and Literacy Coach, each working at Cresaptown ~2 days a week.** Leadership noted that district support would be even more valuable if coaches (or one coach) were at the school full time, providing time to participate in leadership team meetings and quickly follow up with teachers and grade-level teams to apply professional learning.

Formally expanding the Leadership Team (beyond what was accomplished in SY24-25) would:

- Distribute instructional responsibilities beyond the principal and district specialists/coaches.
- Build teacher leadership capacity so that teachers can take on coaching, mentoring, and professional development roles (e.g., facilitating grade-level meetings).

## Teaming Structures

*Shift #2: The school adjusted collaborative planning by moving to extended (2.5 to 3 hours) grade-level team meetings every 3 to 4 weeks instead of weekly 60-minute grade-level planning.*

During the first two months of the school year, collaborative time consisted of:

- Weekly 60-minute collaborative planning (by grade-level).
- Daily common planning time (Teachers prep period).

In December 2024, collaborative planning shifted to include:

- Three-hour collaborative planning sessions for each grade-level, every three weeks.
- Daily common planning time (Teachers prep period).

In Winter and Spring of 2025, the collaborative planning model shifted to:

- Monthly two-and-a-half-hour collaborative planning sessions for each grade-level.
- Daily common planning time (Teachers prep period).
- One weekly collaborative planning period, for each grade.

**Rationale.** The decision to shift to monthly rather than weekly collaborative meetings was made by the Leadership team based on their experience during the first two months of the school year and feedback from teachers, including the Blueprint Teachers. Why was the change made?

- The weekly 60-minute collaborative sessions were hectic and sometimes disruptive:
  - Classroom consistency (instructional and management) was difficult to maintain, as it was a challenge for the Blueprint Teachers to plan for multiple classrooms each week. Also, the rigor of instruction (when teachers left for collaboration time) sometimes declined, as classroom teachers tended to provide Blueprint Teachers with easier tasks instead of standards-based instruction.
- Leadership felt that moving to 3-hour blocks of collaborative time would provide the Blueprint Teachers with: (a) more time to establish authority and relationships in the classrooms where they were co-teaching or providing support and (b) the ability to co-plan and execute more rigorous lessons. Reducing the frequency of transitions/movement would increase consistency.
- The principal and leadership team felt the extended planning time would allow for more meaningful professional development and collaborative planning, rather than just trying to fit it into a shorter weekly session.

### **Result: Challenges and Implications**

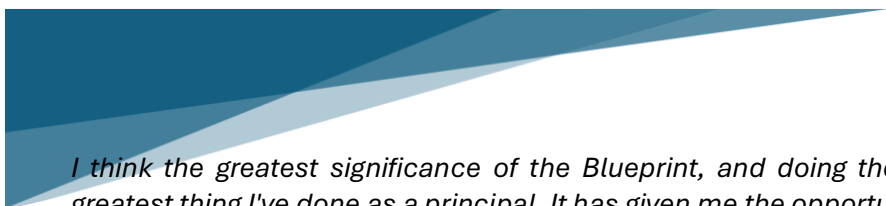
Short term: The initial shift to monthly 3-hour collaborative planning was reported to be well-received by teachers. Grade-level teams were able to engage in more substantive, collaborative planning and professional development, without the disruption and rushed feeling of the weekly sessions. And the Blueprint Teachers were able to develop stronger relationships with students and provide stronger lessons.

Long term: The monthly 3-hour (changed to 2.5 hours in the spring) collaborative sessions became a key mechanism for providing job-embedded professional development and providing teachers with the time to apply professional learning to their lessons and instruction. Formally, a 50/50 model was used, in

which 50 percent of the time was for required professional development and 50 percent for teacher-driven collaborative planning based on teachers' needs and interests.

The collaborative teaming that Cresaptown implemented in SY24-25 included structural changes and careful consideration of how to engage teachers in productive collaboration. Cresaptown's collaborative structures have become useful not because of their structure, but as a result of how these structures were used.

We now turn to the story of how leadership set expectations for the use of effective practices, co-developed professional learning, and supported teachers in implementing effective practices in the classroom. It is also a story of how teachers were invited to begin to learn from each other.



*I think the greatest significance of the Blueprint, and doing the collaborative teaming is the greatest thing I've done as a principal. It has given me the opportunity to train up teachers and to have them be more proficient much faster. So my beginning teachers, they're better because we're collaboratively planning, and they're meeting with master teachers all the time. They're having good conversations, and we didn't have that structure before.*

*I think the culture is very different at our school... now I feel like we are all as a group, very relaxed, like if you wanted to come watch us teach, or they come on and come watch us teach, and that's a really good feeling to have. And it's not just one person. I really feel like it's the whole staff, and the energy is just really good.*

*As a classroom teacher, having that extra time to plan with our reading coach, our math coach, with other teachers, we really have a chance to prepare what we need to prepare, looking at data and to apply, and have the time to do that.*

*I would just say that we have experts in our school. In this career of teaching, we often expect teachers to walk in the back door of the school, go to the classroom, and spend seven and a half hours a day by themselves with kids and then leave, and somehow expect them to improve. Collaboration is important, because we have expert teachers in our school system, and we can learn from one another.*

Cresaptown School Leadership

## Teaming for Instructional Improvement

*Shift #4: Developing a coordinated approach to instructional improvement, that included school-based instructional best practices and the use of multiple strategies to support teachers in applying these practices in the classroom.*

Leadership began the school year with ideas for using multiple strategies—improvement mechanisms—to accomplish its goals. These improvement mechanisms are available to all schools but can be difficult to leverage without the use of collaborative teaming.

Goals	Improvement Mechanisms
To accelerate gains in student achievement To build a collaborative and professional culture for teachers and for students. To implement the district literacy and math initiatives To implement an effective MTSS for students.	Professional Development in ELA and Math Coaching and support Instructional Walkthroughs and Feedback Collaborative Teaming ( <i>New in SY24-25</i> )

Building upon the school’s problem of practice, leadership considered how to proceed with planned professional development, given past practices and ways of working. In the past, teachers were provided with training at the beginning of the year and then expected to implement certain practices (e.g., lesson planning, instructional programming), with minimal guidance or expectations for collaborative learning or feedback.

The key question for leaders was: How can we engage teachers in professional learning that is meaningful, valued, and not entirely top-down?

**Summer Institute.** A Summer Institute was held for all teachers and professional staff. The Summer Institute provided an opportunity for Principal Llewellyn to share a vision for how the school would operate in the coming school year, including the use of expanded collaborative time focused on implementing Literacy and Math programming. Principal Llewellyn also emphasized that the school would be focusing on implementing highly effective practices, with significant input from teachers (e.g., teacher selected professional development). District professional development in Literacy and Math was provided, as well as school-specific professional learning co-developed by the newly designated 60/40 teachers, focusing on text-dependent questions and math problem solving strategies.

**Collaborative Planning and Learning Walks.** Weekly collaborative planning was initiated as planned, supported by district coaches<sup>1</sup>. The school also conducted its first set of Learning Walks, focused on teachers’ use of text-dependent questions. Importantly, teachers were using their collaborative time to apply what they learned in the Summer Institute (how to incorporate text-dependent questions into lessons), and the Learning Walks – framed as a safe opportunity teachers to visit others’ classrooms and non-evaluative – were “looking for” evidence of text-dependent questions. Then, the information collected through the Learning Walks was shared with staff and used by the Instructional Leadership Team to plan the October professional development sessions. Explicitly aligning these three improvement mechanisms

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<sup>1</sup> The term “coaches” is used to refer to the Math Specialist assigned to the school and the Literacy Coach. At the start of the 2024-25 school year, the district had transitioned to using Literacy Coaches (formally ELA specialists) but had not yet trained or renamed Math Specialists as coaches.

(Professional Development, Collaboration, and Learning Walks) and showing teachers that their input would be used was a crucial first step.

The first set of Learning Walks was reported to be successful. Leadership noted that the Walkthrough process highlighted the need to reframe (or reemphasize) the school’s instructional priority; to ensure that all teachers “really know the standards” and that there is aligned instruction within grades, and vertically, across grade spans.

**Expanding and clarifying Instructional Expectations.** Informed by the September Learning Walks and challenges (noted above) with weekly collaborative planning, Leadership made three shifts in how they supported instructional improvement.

- First, collaborative planning was changed from once a week to an extended 3-hour session, once a month.
- Second, Leadership decided to focus on Success Criteria as their instructional priority. Training on Success Criteria was provided during collaboration time and became the basis for Learning Walks. Building teachers’ capacity to use Success Criteria aligned with school and district foci and was seen as having greater potential to impact overall instruction.
- Third, the Walkthrough Process was customized by teachers, to enhance teacher buy-in and to directly connect the Learning Walks with what teachers were being asked to work on collaboratively. Teachers used a portion of the collaborative time to create walkthrough documents outlining the specific success criteria elements they wanted their peers to observe and provide feedback on. Leadership noted that having teachers set the expectation for what to “look for” and asking for feedback has been well-received, especially as teachers are working on success criteria and were given the time to do so.

*“Success criteria are giving us the avenue for instruction to be more robust. Working on success criteria allowed us to have teachers say: “You’re coming into my classroom. Here are the things that I want you to see” while also keeping it safe for teachers to do so, because they were planning together. The teachers were planning together, they were creating together, and then they were sitting and setting the goals together and then developing that into what we are using during the walkthroughs: “you’re coming into my room. Here’s what I want you to look for together.”*

The extended 3-hour collaborative time was first used in late November/early December, to provide time for teachers to learn how to apply Success Criteria to their lesson planning (e.g., to articulate a learning goal and developed specific instructional strategies), and time to develop the Learning Walk tool. Grade-level Learning Walks were scheduled for the week following the 3-hour professional development session.

**Deliberate Professional Learning opportunities.** Work in January through April deepened the use of collaboration and professional learning within and across grades. Maintaining a focus on highly effective practices and Success Criteria, subsequent 3-hour collaborative time progressed from teachers developing specific activities (linked to a Success Criteria) to the development of model lessons and units (or portions of units). In parallel, the Learning Walks expanded from being grade-level specific (e.g., a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher visiting another 3<sup>rd</sup> grade), which is relatively low stakes, to cross-grade Learning Walks, focusing on teachers’ use of Success Criteria and the overall classroom environment. At each step, teachers contributed by working collaboratively on lesson planning and in developing customize Learning

Walk tools and indicators. District coaches have played a key role in supporting some grade-level teams and individual teachers, through close communication with the principal.

**Result: Challenges and Implications**

Through their effort in SY24-25, Cresaptown Elementary has developed an effective model for instructional improvement, but it is just beginning to take hold. The model is intended to build teacher capacity and teacher leaders over time, rather than invest significant resources in Tier 2 interventions. The school has made significant progress in using the iReady assessments and strategic grouping of students, which is not covered in this report.

Cresaptown Elementary’s model for instructional improvement includes strategic, evidence-based professional development that is driven by school-level need and informed by teacher input.

The professional development is: (a) job-embedded, occurring on monthly basis during 3-hour collaborative sessions and (b) directly informed by Learning Walks, data, and teacher input. Learning Walks occur frequently, are teacher-developed and aligned with what teachers are expected to be working on. Importantly, teachers are now open to having visitors in the classroom and there is a growing shared understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like. Collaborative teaming, including the 3-hour monthly sessions and teachers’ increased use of common prep to work together, are now an expected part of the learning environment. And district coaches are playing a significant role in supporting teachers and teacher teams.

**Challenge:** The Pilot Initiative strategies that Cresaptown Elementary implemented are predicated on staffing, district support, and resources. School leadership (inclusive of administrators and teachers) noted that without staffing to provide collaborative time (currently, the two Blueprint Teachers) and ongoing coaching support, it would be difficult to maintain the level of collaboration and job-embedded professional development.

## Building Teacher and Leadership Capacity

### *Shift #4: Exploring ways to leverage the Blueprint Teachers and 60/40 teachers*

The roles and responsibilities of the two 60/40 teachers and two Blueprint Teachers evolved over time, demonstrating how school leadership adapted the use of resources (e.g., teachers) and considered how to best support the professional growth of teachers.

**Building the Capacity of Blueprint Teachers as early-career educators.** Initially, the Blueprint Teachers provided coverage for teachers to participate in collaborative planning. Meeting weekly with the Blueprint Teachers, the principal quickly recognized the challenges they were facing, resulting in the shift to 3-hour collaborative planning sessions rather than weekly sessions. Also, Principal Llewellyn recognized an opportunity to use the Blueprint Teacher position as a way to accelerate the professional growth of teachers. His thinking was that if an early-career teacher (or any teacher) has multiple positive partnerships with experienced teachers, across grades, that this would build capacity and flexibility. Blueprint Teachers were encouraged to take on more responsibility and to build strong relationships with their partner teachers.

As they became more comfortable with the teachers they were providing coverage for, different and more productive partnerships developed. For instance, Blueprint Teachers were able to work more closely with classroom teachers, to develop (and co-develop) the lessons they were planning for. In some instances, Blueprint Teachers supported and engaged in co-teaching with their partner teachers. Additionally, one Blueprint Teacher was invited to work with small groups of students (from the grade-level classrooms) on her own, providing Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction.

Through a combination of peer mentoring, partnering, co-developing lessons, and working together, the Blueprint Teachers became effective teachers capable of “flexing” in to provide effective instruction, across multiple grade-levels and with different groups of students.

### **Changing role of 60/40 Teachers**

The two 60/40 teachers have had an important role in supporting Cresaptown’s instructional improvement. Over the school year, these teachers have taken on increasing responsibilities such as developing and leading professional development, participating in collaborative planning, supporting data meetings, and thinking about overall school improvement. Their work and partnership with leadership, as part of the Instructional Leadership Team, has highlighted the potential that this role (potentially as a Lead Teacher) could have to accelerate school-wide instructional improvement. Leadership envisions how Lead Teachers might take on additional responsibilities such as coaching and mentoring teachers and facilitating collaborative team meetings (daily and monthly).

**Challenge.** As noted previously, the 60/40 teachers retain a full teaching load, which limits their ability to take on school-level leadership roles. The ability of 60/40 teachers (and ultimately, Lead Teachers) to serve as instructional leaders—meeting with administration, leading professional development, and facilitating meetings—requires that these teachers have the time to do so.

## Frequent and Ongoing Use of Data

*Shift #5: Developing a culture in which data is available and actively used to inform school-level and instructional improvement efforts.*

Cresaptown Elementary, like other schools in the district, has experience using assessment data to inform school improvement planning and classroom instruction. The recent adoption of HQIM and assessments, such as iReady (in Reading and Math) and CKLA (in Literacy), has provided additional data and tools. Through the Pilot Initiative, and in particular the use of collaborative planning sessions, data team meetings, and Learning Walk data, Cresaptown Elementary has built the capacity of teachers to use data.

The shift is that teachers are using data more frequently, and in a more sophisticated way, to inform their instruction and student grouping; **student data is used to make instructional decisions.**

The school's deliberate use of Learning Walk data, including creating their own walkthrough tool, has allowed leaders and teachers to examine teacher behaviors and instructional practice; **teacher data is used to inform professional development, coaching, and school-level instructional priorities.**

Cresaptown Elementary now uses a combination of student achievement data and observational data from peer learning walks to guide collaborative planning, professional development, and instructional improvement. This data-driven approach helps them identify strengths, target areas for growth, and ensure that both students and teachers are continuously improving.

*We did the iReady diagnostic in the area of reading and math, we were able to see a lot more data that we couldn't see with just doing DIBELS. [The assessment] broke it down if it was a comprehension issue or if it was their Lexile level. So we were able to really dissect those reports which benefited kids, placing in small groups and other needs that they had.*

*We created our own walkthrough tool, and then we collected data on that and reflected on that data to determine our next steps. After you do a walk through what happens with that data, like...we tabulate it and share it out...we let the whole staff draw conclusions about, here's the data. Now talk about it, and, you know, as a group, in small groups, and let's talk about it as a staff. And then let's create goals based off of that.*

*[Based on the Walkthrough Data} ...we saw that there are lots of things that we're really good at, but there's also things we have some work to do, and that is what's happening formally inside of collaborative planning sessions.*

Lead Teachers

# Braddock Middle School

## What did the school Aim to Accomplish?

**Context.** Braddock Middle School is a mid-sized middle school (~540 students in grades 6 - 8) with 41 full-time teachers (including 6 special educators), of which seventeen (17) have over 20 years of experience and twelve (12) have 5 or less years of experience (2024 Staff Data, MSDE). Identified as an Additional Targeted Support and Intervention (ATSI) school in 2023, Braddock Middle School has consistently produced the highest percentage of students scoring proficient in ELA and Math (MCAP 2024 and 2025) relative to the county's other three middle schools (all middle schools are identified as TSI schools). Exhibiting stable leadership and a relatively stable teacher base, yet with room to grow instructionally, Braddock Middle School was invited to participate in the Pilot School initiative.

In summer 2024, Principal Molly Stewart eagerly embraced the Pilot initiative as an opportunity to accelerate instructional improvement and improve student engagement. Similar to other middle schools, teachers had not previously been provided with dedicated time to work together in content teams. While the school did have certain structural pieces in place (e.g., content area departments, some teaming structures, and a 40-minute LAB period in ELA and Math), Principal Stewart recognized that these structures could be improved. And like the experience of leaders in other schools in the district, it was often challenging for administrators to serve as instructional leaders—to support and reinforce the district's instructional expectations. The Pilot Initiative provided Braddock Middle School with the opportunity to focus on instructional improvement in Tier 1 Core Instruction and refine how students received targeted academic and non-academic support. Additionally, Principal Stewart saw this as an opportunity to build teacher capacity and proactively use Braddock's status as a community school to improve student engagement and efficacy for learning.

**First things first.** At the beginning of SY24-25, Principal Stewart organized a school leadership team (called the Blueprint Implementation Team), comprised of the two assistant principals, teachers from each core content area and grade-level, special educators, the career coach, and two teachers who would take on new roles as Instructional Coaches in Math and Literacy. First, the team sketched out a preliminary plan for the school year that included additional collaborative time for grade-level teams and a collective focus on improving core instruction. Second, a small leadership team met with Brett Lane, the district's Blueprint Strategic Facilitator, to develop an overarching goal for the Pilot work, a Problem of Practice, and to design training for the planned Summer Institute.

## Initial Goal and Problem of Practice

**Goal.** Our overarching goal is to **improve student achievement, specifically among students who may be below grade-level or who are not academically engaged due to academic or social-emotional issues.** Key indicators of progress include: (a) improved attendance among all students and specifically among the target population; (b) academic progress among the target population on iReady; and (c) grade-level or higher progress on MCAP among the target population.

**Problem of Practice.** How can we improve core and tiered instruction and ensure that teachers build strong relationships with students, so that teachers’ instruction is academically engaging, and students receive the support they need to be successful?

**Drivers** that **if we address and improve**, we hypothesize will improve classroom instruction and cultivate positive relationships with students so that they are engaged and supported.

- If we **support teachers in shifting their mindset regarding instructional pedagogy**, from delivering instruction one way and expecting students to learn, to customizing and adapting instruction to meet students’ needs...
- If we **provide teachers with the skills and knowledge** (e.g., the know-how) to effectively differentiate and scaffold their instruction – to included entry points for all students while maintaining the integrity of grade-level standards...
- If we **set explicit expectations for high quality instruction** – academically engaging, student-centered, questioning strategies, and collaborative – that engages and pushes students to think critically...
- If we **use an instructional walkthrough rubric** and provide teachers with constructive feedback...
- If we **share ownership and responsibility for learning and progress with students, allowing for student voice in their learning journey...**

*Then, core instruction will improve, be more academically engaging and meet the needs of more students.*

- If we **establish teaming practices with clear goals and protocols so that teachers make effective use of common planning and use data to inform instruction...**
- If we **improve how LABs are used so that students who are below grade level and/or lack skills are directly supported and access challenging content...**

*Then, students will receive targeted academic support in core classrooms and in LABs.*

- If we build stronger relationships with students and provide space for students safely share SEL issues...

*Then, more students will be ready to learn, feel supported, and able to engage in coursework.*

## Initial Design Components

In summer 2024 and at the beginning of SY24-25, the leadership team worked out the changes that they planned to make, as a general “plan” for implementing Pilot activities.

Braddock Middle School’s plan involved:

- (1) Establishing a School Planning/Implementation Team** to plan, implement, and monitor the Pilot improvement efforts.
- (2) Establishing explicit expectations for high quality, standards-based, and culturally relevant instruction.** Building upon current and recently adopted curriculum, and high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and assessments, the goal was to establish: (1) a strong understanding of curricular resources and lesson planning and (2) pedagogical expectations (e.g., inquiry-based, scaffolding, academically engaging, collaborative) to support teachers in the effective use and delivery of HQIM.

- (3) Implementing a new collaborative teaming structure, with clear goals, protocols, and expectations for data use.** The new teaming structure would serve as the primary mechanism for instructional improvement (Core/Tier 1 instruction and tiered instruction) and non-academic student support. The proposed components of the collaborative teaming structure included:
- Teams comprised of ELA/Math teachers and Science/Social Studies teachers with daily common planning time, led by instructional coaches and teacher leaders in Social Studies and Science. The design called for grade-level teachers to have ~82 minutes of daily collaborative time, comprised of 41 minutes of individual prep and 41 minutes of collaborative team time. The initial design envisioned the follow use of time:
    - Content Teams: Daily and a half-day of planning (every 6 weeks) focused on unit design and content/foci for LABs.
    - Co-Teaching: one day for **formal planning** to co-teach.
    - Student Solutions: one day for **Student Solutions**
- (4) Designing and implementing a system of coaching, feedback and support for teachers.** The initial design involved: (1) using an instructional walkthrough rubric to monitor instructional progress and provide feedback to teachers in reference to curricular expectation and pedagogical expectations; (2) re-examining the role of Math and ELA specialists as “instructional” coaches and an expanded role for Teacher Leaders; and (3) establishing teacher leaders (e.g., 60/40 teachers) with two additional periods allocated for coaching and mentoring.
- (5) Design and implement MTSS.** School leaders aimed to develop a process to quickly identify students that may need academic or non-academic support and then provide those students with targeted support through multiple venues, including during Tier 1 instruction. The work in this area would include: (1) figuring out (as a Pilot school) how to more effectively use diagnostics and early warning indicators; (2) potentially redesigning the WIN/LAB time; (c) revisiting the role of the Pupil Services Team (PST) to include academic, behavioral and SEL needs of students; and (d) tutoring.
- (6) Improving Student Engagement, Student Voice, and Student Efficacy:** Leadership identified improving student engagement and student voice as a critical need and committed to build this out over the school year. Ideas such as increased mentoring; student-led conferences; parent events; focus Friday; and strategic use of the career coach were identified as starting points.

## Moving from Planning to Implementation

**The August 2024 Summer Institute** was a crucial first step in laying the foundation for improving core instruction and showing teachers that they would have opportunities to work together—that their input was valued and expected. Teachers were (re)introduced to instructional expectations (e.g., lesson planning, visible learning, and teacher clarity) focused on developing clear learning targets and success criteria. Then, teachers were given time to work collaborative, on their instruction and in thinking about how to increase student voice and engagement. Collectively, the Summer Institute set the tone for ongoing collaborative planning and professional learning to occur during the school year.

*Strategic implementation requires adaptation and modification, as challenges emerge and as the implementors (leaders and teachers) use data—their lived experience and information—to learn and make strategic adjustments. District and school leaders are invited to learn from Braddock Middle School’s experience to consider how similar Blueprint strategies might be implemented across the district.*

## What Happened? How were the changes implemented?

During the first four to five months of the school year, school leadership worked to implement each design component, guided by the overarching and interrelated goals—to improve core and tiered instruction and improve student engagement. Leadership was guided by, and exhibited, an ongoing focus on continuous improvement; they were grappling with how to “get better” rather than simply implement evidence-based and high-quality instructional material and “hope” that instruction would improve. The story of Braddock Middle School explores how a school strives to become learning organization capable of adjusting, refining, and sometimes developing new ways of operating (how teachers and leaders work together) to be able to implement high quality instructional materials.

The following narrative summarizes the key changes and actions that school leadership made over the school. This information may be useful to schools engaged in similar improvement efforts. When possible, we highlight “how” the school endeavored to change behaviors, mindsets, and structures. Each change is framed by a question that illustrates the challenges and dilemmas school leadership faced as they endeavored to implement their Pilot initiative.

### Teaming for Instructional Improvement

*How can we run effective teacher teams if our teachers have had little experience working together collaboratively to improve instruction?*

#### *Key Change #1: Establishing regular teaming practices, goals, and ways of working.*

Leadership recognized that effective grade-level teaming was needed to improve classroom instruction. Specifically, teachers needed time and support to apply the professional development that they received during the Summer Institute and the prior year. In the past, teachers were provided with training at the beginning of the year and then expected to implement certain practices (e.g., lesson planning, instructional programming), with minimal guidance or expectations for collaborative learning or feedback.

In the first two months, leadership (the principal and assistant principals), instructional coaches (one Math and one ELA) and the two teacher leaders planned and participated in the majority of grade-level collaborative teaming. As designed, each grade-level had ~82 minutes of common planning, which allowed for 41 minutes of individual prep and 41 minutes for some type of collaborative planning. Initially, the plan called for teacher leaders (in each content area) to “lead” and support planning. The daily schedule of collab time emerged over time, as leadership experimented with running agendas (for student solution meetings) and leaned more heavily on the Math and Literacy coaches to support teachers with two related instructional planning tasks that could be worked on collaborative, on different days (see below). The teaming schedule used towards the end of the school year included:

- Monday: Full grade-level meeting – often Student Solutions (1x/week)
- Tuesday: Content-based lesson planning for the ELA and Math teachers in a grade-level, including a Special Education teacher, supported by the Instructional Coach.
- Wednesday: A flex day, that could be used for additional planning, individualized coaching and support to teachers on lesson planning, and data meetings.
- Thursday: Content teachers working together with the Special Educator to develop Tier 1 strategies to support students who may be struggling.

- Friday: A flex day, used for additional planning, student support meetings, and individualized coaching.

It is important to note that the teaming schedule listed above took time to develop and leadership worked diligently to encourage teachers to play an active role in all conversations.

According to leadership, the emerging use of Unit Internalization<sup>1</sup> sessions during school professional development days (separate from collab time and held every 4 to 6 weeks) was a key factor that grounded the work in collab time. The Unit Internalization work built upon the Summer Institute by providing time during the school year for teachers to develop essential questions, identify Success Criteria and consider instructional strategies to support student engagement for upcoming units. Leadership and coaches noted that by the spring of 2025, teachers were more comfortable with lesson planning (e.g., Lesson Internalization, planning, reviewing standards) and co-planning with special educators during their weekly collab time due to the Unit Internalization work. Teachers were now “really digging into planning...not just for the lesson the next day, but how to plan for LAB groups and the kids in front of them.” In ELA, Unit and Lesson Internalization protocols used by the Literacy Coach (based on TNTP training) supported this work. In Math, similar lesson planning tools and guidance were developed over time, as leadership, coaches, and teachers became more familiar with resources included in the iReady curriculum.

**Results, Challenges, and Implications.** Leadership recognizes that although teaming practices have improved there is still room for improvement.

One challenge that emerged during the year was building trust among coaches, leadership (administrators), and teachers. School leadership is deeply committed to improvement and thus had to balance the urgency to improve with the importance of building strong relationships among staff to enable learning and sharing (rather than defensiveness and avoidance).

A second challenge was finding common planning time for all grade-level team members including special educators. Maintaining coverage (e.g., finding substitutes) sometimes made it difficult to maintain regular and consistent meeting schedules.

Despite these challenges, the school made progress by focusing on instructional improvement, providing teachers with the tools to improve, and working to create structures that supported both formal and informal teacher collaboration.

*ONE OF THE MOST IMMEDIATE SUCCESSES THAT WE ARE SEEING IS TRULY THOSE RELATIONSHIPS BUILDING... REALLY HAVING THAT VULNERABILITY TO LEAN ON YOUR COLLEAGUES AND TO LOOK AT, HOW CAN WE DO THIS TOGETHER? HOW CAN WE GET WHERE WE'RE TRYING TO GO, WHERE WE ARE A TEAM, WE ALL HAVE SIMILAR GOALS IN COMMON, MEETING THOSE IDENTIFIED LEARNING INTENTIONS AND GETTING TO THAT SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR OUR KIDS.*

Instructional Coach

<sup>1</sup> Unit Internalization is a foundational process of the Standards Movement that teachers have been expected to use since the 1990s. Unit Internalization is the process by which content teachers deeply understand the content, goals, and design of a unit to then develop lessons and instructional strategies, including developing common formative and summative assessments to assess student learning. The Term “Unit Internalization” is the current term used by HQIM providers and is similar in purpose and goals to previous processes such as unpacking standards, backward design, and curriculum alignment.

## Instructional Leadership and Coaching

*How can we provide useful instructional feedback and guidance to teachers so that the feedback is valued and used?*

*How can we roll out instructional walkthroughs so that they are welcomed and do not lead to defensiveness?*

*How can we build the overall instructional know-how (e.g., capacity and skill) of our coaches, leaders, and teachers – to be more effective leaders, coaches, and teachers?*

Improving the quality of Tier I core instruction was, and continues to be, the school's priority. Going into the school year, leadership recognized that some of the instruction being provided to students was not grade-level and standards-based and did not sufficiently engage students in learning. Too many students were below grade-level on state and local assessments, requiring Tier 2 interventions. The Pilot Initiative provided an opportunity to re-envision how collaborative teaming structures could be used to improve the design and delivery of standards-based instruction. The dilemma, however, was that there was an overall lack of instructional "know-how" among teachers and leaders.

How did the school attack this challenge?

### *Key Change #2: Being explicit about identifying and expanding instructional expertise*

The Summer Institute provided foundational instructional expectations for the use of HQIM and lesson planning and set the tone for the school year, by emphasizing that "we are our best resources" and that everyone shares responsibility for student success. Identifying and spreading instructional expertise was crucial because no one was coming in from the outside to provide a solution or save the day.

**Instructional Coaching – Building capacity and leveraging expertise.** Having two instructional coaches and two lead teachers (in Social Studies and Science) provided a welcome challenge, as leadership collectively considered the roles and responsibilities of the entire leadership team (e.g., coaches, administrators, lead teachers) to effectively drive instructional improvement. In the fall of 2024, district-level math specialists had received minimal training on instructional coaching and literacy coaches had received one year of training; overall, the district was in the early stages of thinking about how to leverage instructional coaches. Similarly, the two lead teachers were talking on new roles, such as coaching and mentoring, which would require time to develop.

Over the school year, school leaders and the two coaches were able to work with and learn from each other and with, to consider how they could: (1) effectively support grade-level teams; (2) provide coaching, modeling, and support to individual teachers; and (3) utilize instructional walkthroughs and increase relational trust among teachers so that feedback would be valued and requested.

**Facilitating and supporting grade-level teams.** During the first few months of the school year, leadership and coaches refined teaming protocols used for lesson planning and student solutions. As noted in Key Change #1, the use of Unit and Lesson Internalization processes were implemented and then routinely used by teachers. Learning from each other, the Math coach began to apply iReady lesson planning tools to mirror how ELA teachers were engaging in standards-based lesson planning.

Additionally, the coaches developed a school-specific student profile tool to help grade-level teams discuss student strengths, challenges, and strategies in a structured way.

**Result and Implications.** By the end of the school year, teacher teams were engaged in routine use of protocols and meeting processes, in grade-level and content meetings. The capacity of Instructional Coaches to facilitate and support grade-level teaming increased. In addition to teachers working together to develop effective units and lessons, leaders noted that the “culture has shifted” as teachers have been encouraged to learn from each other, breaking down the “island” mentality of teachers working independently, in their own class. Slowly, teachers’ mindsets have shifted so that they see the value of collaboration and distributed leadership, which provide opportunities for teachers to share their expertise, lead and learn from each other. Evidence that classroom instruction improved was documented through the instructional walkthrough and in the continued growth of student academic achievement on state assessments.

**Coaching, Mentoring and Instructional Walkthroughs.** The primary purpose of instructional coaching and mentoring is to support teachers in improving their professional practice. Coaching requires individuals with expert knowledge of content and pedagogy and the professional skills to engage teachers in productive conversations, often organized in a coaching cycle that includes modeling, co-planning, informal observations, and instructional feedback.

Entering the school year, Braddock Middle School leadership, instructional coaches, and lead teachers came together with different levels of instructional expertise and experience providing coaching and feedback to teachers. The Math Coach was in a new role, having previously been a teacher at the school. The Literacy Coach had some experience working in another school and access to district training. The two lead teachers were respected by colleagues but had limited experience actively coaching others. And administrators acknowledged that opportunities for teachers to receive feedback or observe each other’s instruction practices were limited. A concern voiced by all was that teachers might be “defensive” about receiving feedback that wasn’t positive and that teachers might be reluctant to visit classrooms and learn from each other.

By the end of the school year, a coaching model had emerged and was being planned for SY2025-26.

Table 1. Summary of Braddock Middle School progress in building instructional coaching capacity.

	Fall 2024	By Spring 2025	Planned Fall 2025
Coaching Model in place	No	Literacy – Developing, primarily facilitation of meetings and selected modeling and coaching of teachers. Math – Beginning; primarily facilitation of meetings. Science and Social Studies – Developing, with lead teachers working closely with colleagues via co-teaching, establishing coaching cycles, and modeling instruction.	Formal facilitation of Tuesday Collab meeting to directly inform instruction and use of LAB time.  Structured coaching cycles

Instructional Walkthroughs	No	Implemented multiple walkthroughs, led by Instructional Coaches and used to assess schoolwide trends.	Instructional Walkthroughs focused on instructional priorities. Peer Walkthroughs.
Scheduled Support for Teachers	No	Yes, built into collab time; provided on a voluntary basis with teachers.	Support periods will be formalized in collab time.
Teacher receptivity to feedback	Some	Growing/Developing over the school year.	To be determined.
Administrator capacity to provide useful feedback.	Limited	Growing.	To be determined.

**Leadership Actions that supported the school’s development of a coaching model.**

First, the instructional coaches were intentional about how they worked with each other to share coaching strategies and “get better” at coaching, by meeting regularly and observing each other facilitating team meetings. Working closely with the principal and administrators, coaches were given the responsibility of facilitating grade-level team meetings and time to build relationships with teachers, which was necessary to effectively lead collaborative team meetings. The lead teachers were able to more quickly establish in-class approaches to coaching, providing feedback, and modeling lessons (in Science and Social Studies), due in part to their continuing role as content teachers and a full member of the department team. There were differences in how teachers perceived Instructional Coaches compared to lead teachers, which may have influenced teachers’ receptivity to coaching and feedback.

Second, coaches worked with and were paired with expert teachers and teacher leaders, to “practice” coaching strategies and develop a shared understanding of high-quality instruction. The pairing of expert teachers (who demonstrate effective instruction and are reflective about their practice) with new/emerging coaches may be a way to build the capacity of instructional coaches and reduce the anxiety of other teachers regarding coaching and receiving feedback. Training provided to the Math Coach, through the Harvard Mathematical Instructional Quality (MQI) coaching program, providing a foundation for thinking about coaching and how to improve instruction (this training is being used with Math specialists across the county). The Literacy Coach participated in district training, provided by TNTP and supported by district literacy supervisors.

Third, leadership strategically rolled out instructional walkthroughs by focusing on instructional priorities and limiting the scope of walkthroughs to the aggregation of data. Instead of using instructional walkthroughs to provide teacher-specific feedback or ask teachers to visit each other, the walkthroughs (conducted by the instructional coaches) focused on schoolwide trends to inform professional development. Also important was the decision to develop school-based walkthrough protocols and indicators that were directly aligned with the school’s instructional priorities, within the framework of the HQIM and curriculum being implemented.

**Results, Challenges, and Implications.** Teaming structures and a coaching model have been established, although this is still a work in progress. Challenges that the school faced and will continue

to work on include (a) building the capacity of teacher leaders and (b) building relational trust among all teachers, coaches, and leaders so that instructional feedback is valued, requested, and used.

The school initially envisioned grade-level team meetings being run by teachers, with some support from instructional coaches. The school is still developing teacher leaders in each content area and grade who can facilitate meetings independently. Addressing this challenge involves developing teachers (e.g., potential National Board Certified (NBC) teachers or lead teachers) with the skill to lead team meetings. Equally important is the need to continue to cultivate relational trust among teachers, so that teachers truly see the value in sharing, planning together, and have collective responsibility for the success of all students in their grade (and the school).

Building a professional environment in which teachers value instructional feedback and are collectively reflective about their practice is a second challenge. As the Pilot work was implemented, administrators noted a “natural tendency” among teachers to want to be seen as highly effective and to avoid showing vulnerability or admitting struggles; to the point that some teachers equated praise for one colleague with criticism of others, leading to feelings of being devalued. In some instances, teachers might appear to be defensive about feedback and seen as way of being observed or critiqued, making it difficult to foster open, collaborative discussions. Building trust between coaches, administrators, and teachers was an ongoing process, with some teachers more receptive than others.

### **Administrator and Coach Suggestions**

During multiple conversations with school leadership the following strategies and ideas were generated as ways to leverage NBC (Level 3) teachers, coaches, and potential teacher leaders. These ideas are shared here, including some which are being implemented by Braddock Middle School in SY2025-26.

1. Implement structured coaching cycles focused on specific instructional goals, pairing coaches with teachers demonstrating highly effective instruction, so that coaches may learn and have knowledge of exemplary instruction that can be shared across the school.
2. Create opportunities for coaches to:
  - Model best practices in classrooms
  - Cover classes so teachers can observe each other
  - Provide targeted, data-driven feedback
  - Support small group instruction (e.g., as part of Tier I or during Tier 2 time)
3. Develop a clear career pathway that recognizes coaches' contributions, potentially through:
  - Nomination processes for advanced roles
  - Local funding for stipends
  - Opportunities to lead professional development
4. Encourage coaches to use inquiry-based approaches, asking reflective questions rather than giving directives.
5. Allow coaches the flexibility to work across grade levels and content areas.

## Student Engagement and Student Led Conferences

*How do we share ownership and responsibility for learning and progress with students, allowing for student voice in their learning journey?*

Like many districts and schools across Maryland, Braddock Middle School’s leadership and teachers expressed ongoing concerns about student motivation, engagement, and ownership of learning. Without “blaming” students, some teachers were frustrated that some “students don’t seem to care” about school and weren’t motivated. Recognizing that improving student engagement was a real need and concerned about teachers’ growing frustration, Principal Stewart acted.

### *Key Change #3: Implementing Student-Led Conferences*

Building upon her experience and current research on how to increase student voice, Principal Stewart met with leadership and teachers and proposed using student-led conferences as a way to give students more responsibility and voice in their learning journey. Her thinking was that by having students prepare and lead conferences—sharing their data, work samples, strengths, and areas for growth with their parents—they would become more invested in their learning. Proposing student-led conferences also demonstrated to staff that their voice (as teachers) was heard and that a concerted effort was being made to address this challenge. With leadership and teachers on board, the school began planning for student-led conferences in October, about 6 weeks into the school year.

**The First Student-Led Conference – a quick win and suggestions for improvement.** In October 2024, Allegany County Public Schools hosted the first of two scheduled Parent Conference Days, structuring these days as “student-led conferences”. Prior to conference day, WIN (What I Need) time was used to “train” students on how to share information with their parents, and provide time for students to prepare portfolio presentations (e.g., data points, work samples, goal setting w/plans). Academic teachers began working with students to think about what they could include in their portfolios. WIN teachers scheduled parent’s times and facilitated the student-led conference for and with their WIN students.

Nearly all parents attended their students’ conference, which was in itself a success. School leadership proactively designed a simple feedback form that was given to all parents. Leadership was pleased to receive more feedback than they had perhaps anticipated. Feedback from parents was resoundingly positive (nearly all said they liked it) and also included feedback to enhance the next conference day. The positive feedback came in many forms, with some parents noting amazement (and some anxiety) in hearing their kids describe what they were learning, and other parents learning (perhaps for the first time) what their children were challenged with and where they were thriving—all shared by students in their own voice as a student learner. Parent suggestions for improvement included multiple requests to build in time to meet with all teachers or specific teachers if there were concerns; for instance, many parents of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students noted that they had not met their student’s team of teachers and would like the opportunity to do so on conference day.

## **The Second Student-Led Conference – Improvements and Successes**

The second conference day in February 2025 allowed Braddock Middle School an opportunity to implement parent suggestions. Knowing what was expected of students, teachers were more explicit in how they helped students prepare their portfolios, linking student work with unit and lesson learning targets. And perhaps most important, students could build upon their experience in October, turning student-led conferences from a “new” practice to one that will become routine.

Incorporating the main parent suggestions, the February student-led conferences included two parts. First, the school set up 25 stations in the gym where parents and students could sit together and have their conference. School administrators and staff (guidance counselors, instructional assistants, coaches, office staff) circulated throughout to answer any questions and keep things moving. Second, after finishing the student-led portion of the conference, students and parents were able to visit choice content teachers to discuss any specific concerns. Feedback from the February conference was overwhelmingly positive. The overall atmosphere was upbeat and cheerful, and parents noted onsite, and in feedback forms, that having the opportunity to have the student-led conference and a choice to visit teachers was great.

## **What did Braddock Middle School Learn and what has improved?**

The thoughtful and strategic manner by which school leadership designed and implemented student-led conferences was crucial to its success and continued use in SY2025-26. Asking for feedback from parents, shifting the structure of the February conference, and providing “training” and support to students are just a few of the key leadership actions that contributed to success. Teachers are noting that students now have a vested interest in the “learning targets” and their own academic work, because they have the opportunity to share, in their own voice, their academic progress with parents and caregivers. Teachers can recommend exemplary student work to be included in a specific student’s portfolio. And students are (anecdotally) paying more attention to lessons and learning targets, with an eye towards their portfolio.

Leadership also stated that “there were a lot of little things unveiled, that we didn’t ever intend to be known” that have improved communication and understanding between the school and parents and caregivers.

This year, the first conference day in October will follow the structure of the February day with 2 additional changes- online portfolio instead of paper and a cue card of guiding questions for parents.

In sum, Student-led Conferences at Braddock Middle School resulted in the following:

- increased parent involvement
- increased confidence, engagement, and motivation of students
- students were able to verbalize who they are as learners (strengths, needs, etc.)
- students and parents understand trajectory of data on standardized assessments

Student-led Conferences will continue at Braddock Middle School in SY2025-26 with two additional modifications: (1) students are using and preparing digital portfolios, which will expand the quality and the types of student work that can be shared and (2) parents will be provided with a cue card of potential guiding questions to help those who may struggle to get the conversation going.

## Tiered Academic Support

*How do we shift teachers' mindsets and processes regarding the use of LAB time, so that students truly receive individualized academic support as part of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)?*

Each of Allegany County's middle schools has daily LAB classes in ELA and Math. In some schools the LAB class is scheduled as part of an ELA or Math block (e.g., 41 minutes of core instruction followed by 41 minutes of LAB). Braddock Middle School's schedule did provide 82 minutes for Core and LAB and began the school year with this schedule in place. However, Leadership was keenly aware that LAB time was not being used consistently or effectively across all teachers, for all students. In conversations with leadership and during informal visits to classrooms (in Fall 2024), many students appeared to be using the iReady platform to work on skills and activities during LAB, but student work was not consistently monitored or supported. Some teachers were using LAB time effectively to support students, while in other classes, students were being loosely monitored and supported, despite teachers having access to progress monitoring data and assessments. Leadership and coaches also noted that some students were being pulled out of LAB time to receive individualize Tier 3 interventions.

The school identified a number of challenges, or potential root causes: (1) some teachers may not know how to effectively use progress monitoring data to plan for LAB; (2) teachers may need training and support in planning for LAB; and (3) teachers may not fully understood the relationship between Tier 1 Core Instruction, when and how to target Tier 2 support, and when Tier 3 was to be provided. Leadership recognized these as challenges for the school—for leadership—to address, based on the premise that teachers needed to be more effectively supported.

### How did the school attack this challenge?

*Key Change #4: Developing an effective system and process for providing students with student-specific academic support (e.g., Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports)*

Over the first few months of the school year, leadership and coaches instituted collaboration time (as noted) and developed protocols for reviewing students' needs, primarily during the Student Support team time. Expectations for the use of LAB time were communicated to teachers. And the instructional coaches began to work with content teams, during their Tuesday collaboration time, to plan for core and tiered instruction for the entire 82-minute block of time. As teachers grew more comfortable with Unit and Lesson Internalization, their ability to review data, lessons, and to think about how the LAB time could be used in a more strategic manner grew as well. However, some students continued to be pulled out of LAB time for Tier Three interventions. A structural shift was needed.

School leadership, with considerable input from the Instructional Coaches, redesigned a system for providing Tier Two and Tier Three academic support to students, as part of the school's overall MTSS. The redesign involved three key actions: (1) the creation of a Functionally Intensive Teaching (FIT) approach for providing dedicated Tier Three intervention support to targeted students **in addition to** all students having access to LAB class, especially in Literacy; and (2) developing clear expectations for the use of LAB time supported by Instructional Coaches facilitation of team meetings and direct academic support.

The FIT time is a formal class that provides an additional 41 minutes of intensive instruction, scheduled by reallocating time from Physical Education (students receive 82 minutes of PE but are only required to have 41, so the extra time is used for FIT). FIT provides time for students most in need of individualized academic support and serves as time and space for the provision of Tier Three interventions. Previously, these students—those requiring the most support—were being pulled out of LAB class, and thus not receiving Tier Two support. Additionally, some students requiring Tier Three interventions may not have had access to teachers skilled in providing the appropriate intervention. MTSS calls for students to receive high-quality Tier One instruction, opportunities for acceleration and intervention through Tier 2 supports, and additional Tier Three intervention, when necessary and based on data. Braddock Middle School’s development of the FIT class represents a significant shift that is aligned with evidence-based MTSS instructional practices. Students are selected for FIT based on a combination of data, including Lexile levels, state testing results, and iReady diagnostic performance.

In summary, Braddock Middle School’s MTSS system including Core Instruction in Math and ELA includes:

**Tier One: Core instruction** [~41 minutes daily] for all students

**Tier Two: LAB period** [~41 minutes daily] for all students

- Flexible, data-driven small group instruction.
- Grouping Strategies: Groups change weekly based on specific skill needs.
- iReady individualize pathway used in Reading.
- Allows for remediation, acceleration, and addressing specific skill deficits.
- Teachers are able to plan for how to target small group instruction during LAB.

**Tier Three: A separate FIT class** for a targeted group of students struggling the most academically.

- In addition to LAB.
- Taught by skilled teachers and staff.

### **Key Leadership Actions contributing to the redesigned MTSS approach and the FIT class**


**Adapting the schedule to meet students’ needs rather than scheduling students.** Leadership worked collaboratively to develop a creative and data-driven approach to MTSS, including core and tiered support, to ensure all students received the right level of instructional intervention without sacrificing core or supplemental learning opportunities. They aimed to protect each Tier of instruction and ensure that the schedule fits the students’ needs, not the other way around. Developing the FIT class was the solution to these challenges, as a way to provide the most at-risk students with the targeted support necessary for academic growth without compromising their access to Tier One instruction and Tier Two support.

**Embracing Data Use among Leadership and Teachers.** Leadership and coaches noted that while the school had been using data, that data use didn’t always translate into specific strategies or meaningful interventions. As the shift was made to introduce the FIT class, leadership and coaches took an even closer look at student data with an eye towards using FIT and LAB time more effectively. They reviewed a wide range of student data to identify learning deficits and determine which students needed additional support. Rather than relying on a single data point, leadership used an “amalgamation of different data” to pinpoint

students who would most benefit from Tier Three interventions, in some cases identifying students who might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Additionally, instructional coaches have been able to proactively support grade-level teams to make better use of classroom assessments, focusing exclusively on targeted interventions, grouping, and support during LAB.

### **Results, Challenges, and Implications.**

Braddock Middle School's approach to tiered support was built on careful data analysis, creative scheduling, and a commitment to protecting instructional time for all tiers. Specifically, Braddock Middle School's overall approach to MTSS (e.g., ensuring students' access to Tier One, Two, and Three) has contributed to improved student outcomes and is being considered for implementation in other schools. The school experienced significant growth, with students achieving 180% of expected annual growth by mid-year.



ONE OF THE BENEFITS OF THE BLUEPRINT PILOT FOR US HAS BEEN ... BEING ABLE TO GET A LITTLE BIT CREATIVE WITH OUR SCHEDULING. DURING THE MIDPOINT OF THE YEAR, WHEN WE WERE LOOKING AT DATA AND LOOKING AT DEFICITS AND...TRYING TO SEE: WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE? WHERE DO WE NEED TO GO WITH THIS? WE STARTED TAKING A LOOK AT SOME OF OUR KIDS INVOLVED IN ONE OF OUR TIER THREE SUPPORTS, WHICH IS OUR READ 180 PROGRAM. BUT WHAT WE REALIZED ABOUT THE WAY WE HAD PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED READ 180 WAS THAT READ 180 WAS OCCURRING DURING OUR LAB PORTION OF THE DAY. NOW AT BRADDOCK, WE HAVE BOTH A CORE TIER ONE INSTRUCTIONAL PERIOD, AND WE HAVE A LAB PORTION WHICH IS INTENDED TO BE AN EXTENSION OF THE TIER ONE AND ENCOMPASSING TIER TWO SUPPORTS, DEPENDING ON WHATEVER THE KIDS NEED. THEY NEED ACCELERATION. THEY GET ACCELERATION. THEY NEED REMEDIATION. WE WORK ON THAT AT THAT TIME, BUT DUE TO THE NATURE OF OUR PREVIOUS SCHEDULE, THAT TIER THREE SUPPORT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE PLACE DURING THAT LAST PORTION OF TIME. SO WHAT HAPPENS IN THAT CASE? WELL, YOU'RE LOSING A LOT OF THAT TIER TWO. AND BECAUSE OF THAT, WE GOT THINKING ABOUT THAT AND DECIDED TO FIGURE OUT HOW WE COULD BEST RESPECT ALL TIERS OF INSTRUCTION TO MAKE SURE THAT THE TIER ONE WAS HIT, THE TIER TWO WAS HIT, THE TIER THREE WAS HIT.

Instructional Coach

# Fort Hill High School

## What did the school Aim to Accomplish?

**Context.** Fort Hill High School is a small comprehensive high school (~655 students) with 42 full-time teachers, of which seventeen (17) have over 20 years of experience and six (6) have 5 or less years of experience (2024 Staff Data, MSDE). Improving the academic achievement of students in Mathematics, particularly among students taking Algebra I in high school, is a challenge for each of Allegany’s three high schools. Less than 10 percent of high school Algebra I students score proficient (a score of 3 or 4) on the MCAP Algebra I test (2024 and 2025 data). Equally important is the need to improve academic achievement in English, Science, and History. As in similar districts and high schools across the country, high rates of chronic absenteeism remain a challenge. Fort Hill is led by a passionate principal and leadership team, and teachers who are committed to making changes to improve learning; they recognized the challenges facing their school and demonstrated a commitment to improve. District leadership invited Fort Hill to participate in the Pilot School initiative.

In summer 2024, Principal Canan initially saw the Pilot initiative as an opportunity to immediately address the growing number of students requiring credit recovery. One goal was to provide time and support for students to work on credit recovery during the school day, with “light” supervision and without pulling students out of their core academic classrooms. Principal Canan also envisioned implementing a hybrid schedule for Math and English teachers, that would provide additional time for collaboration and provide teachers with a “Support” period that could be used in a variety of ways. Entering the summer of 2024, Principal Canan had crafted a schedule that would allow for additional collaborative time and Support periods; however, leadership had not yet designed how teachers would use their collaborative time.

At the beginning of SY24-25, Principal Canan convened a small leadership team, comprised of her assistant principals and the English and Math department heads. Together, we designed the core components of Fort Hill’s pilot initiative, by articulating an overarching Goal and Problem of Practice.

**Goal.** Our overarching goal is to improve student achievement. Too many students are falling behind (e.g., failing courses) and requiring credit recovery in order to graduate. Our specific goals are to: (a) reduce the number and percentage of students taking credit recovery (APEX); (b) increase overall rates of students successfully completing credit recovery; and (c) increase the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students on track to graduate, focusing on students showing growth on the Algebra 1 assessment.

**Problem of Practice.** How can we improve core and tiered instruction and provide more targeted support to students to increase student achievement and reduce failure rates?

*Drivers* that **if we address and improve**, we hypothesize will improve classroom instruction and reduce student failure rates.

If content area and special education teachers have time to plan for co-teaching and we strengthen the rigor and consistency of content area instruction...

If leaders and teachers use data to identify the skills and concepts that students need support with AND we provide students with individualized support...

*Then* more students will successfully pass 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade core classes and be on track to meet CCR standards and enter CCR pathways with no credit recovery.

## Initial Design Components

In summer 2024 and at the beginning of SY24-25, the school leadership articulated the changes that they planned to make, as a general “plan” for implementing Pilot activities.

The preliminary actions included developing a master schedule and a leadership team, which were set up prior to the start of the school year.

**Design and implement a new master schedule** that will: (a) provide 90 minutes of *collaborative planning time* for ELA and Math teachers and (b) provide *Student Support time* embedded throughout students’ schedules (in all content areas), staffed by ELA and Math teachers as “Student Support” Teachers.

**Establish an administrative MTSS team** that can meet daily (before 7:50 am) to discuss organizational and student needs, monitor the progress of support, and serve as additional time for student support.

Then, working with district supervisors and the Blueprint Strategic Facilitator, Fort Hill leadership fleshed out the design of their Pilot in greater detail, focusing on how the collaborative planning time could be used to improve instruction, and how teachers might use the Student Support periods. The plan to enter the school year included implementing the Master Schedule and setting expectations for Collab Team Time [See Appendix A].

### Master Schedule that provides dedicated Collab Time

A six-period schedule was implemented, that included one 90-minute period through which students could complete a full year of course work in one semester. The 90-minute period also provided scheduled time for the ELA team and Math team to have a daily collaborative planning, in addition to individual prep.

### Breakdown of Collab and Student Support opportunities by Content Area

	~45 minutes of common “collab” time (daily)	~45 minutes of individual prep (daily)	~45 minute Support period (daily)
<b>ELA Teachers</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Math Teachers</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Social Studies Teachers</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Science Teachers</b>	No	Yes	Yes

### Team Planning Time: Improving Core Instruction

English and Math Content teams would meet 2x/week to **improve core instruction**, focusing on:

- **Core Instruction Data Analysis:** Collab time was to be used to review MCAP data and formal assessments (e.g., MAP, unit assessments, grades) and to develop common assessments.
- **Develop Curricular Resources:** Based on initial data analysis and ongoing formative assessments, Collab time was to be used to: (1) develop specific curricular resources and warm up activities; (2) develop common instructional supports (cross-grade); and (3) develop and use formative assessments to support instruction and progress monitor.

### Team Planning Time: Student Support

English and Math Content teams would meet 2x/week to determine and coordinate how the team will use the Support Period to provide academic support to identified students.

- **Student Support Data Analysis:** Initial and ongoing use of screening data and ongoing assessments (including SEL data) to determine which students will receive support and progress monitor the impact of support.
- **Determine and Coordinate Support:** Time for teacher teams to determine the specific interventions/support for individuals or groups of students and to coordinate the provision of support.

## Initial Implementation and Strategic Modifications

During the first six weeks of the school year, the English and Math teams began to meet and use their Collab time, focusing on improving core instruction and data use. Prior to this school year, department teams had not met regularly and had little to no experience working together as a team. Teachers did not have teaming protocols that they could use and thus struggled to understand the goal and purpose of meeting together. In the first six weeks, district coaches and specialists met with each team 1 or 2 days a week and the school's assistant principal also met and led a portion of the English Collab team sessions. Principal Canan participated in (e.g., observing and contributing) Collab team meetings so that teachers would begin to take ownership of the content and focus of team meetings. The following challenges emerged, as documented in late October 2024.

### English Collab Time

The school's assistant principal worked with the English team to develop a mission and establish expectations and norms for Collab time. Teachers identified student writing as an instructional priority and agreed that having a consistent approach to writing instruction would be useful. However, the team struggled to take ownership of the Collab time and develop specific next steps to design and implement a consistent approach to writing.

The English team also spent ~2 days a week reviewing data and considering how to use the Student Support teachers and periods. Led in part by the district's literacy coach, the English team reviewed data to identify students' needs. Teachers noted that they needed specific strategies (e.g., interventions or classroom practices) that they could use with students. Teachers did not appear to have access to clear models and strategies for co-teaching and how to engage in effective co-planning. Data was being analyzed, but without clear actions and next steps to address areas of need identified by the data.

### Math Collab Time

The Math team began to work together as a team, due in part to a shared focus and urgency to improve Algebra I instruction and achievement. Over the first 6 weeks, the Math team decided to focus their conversations on co-planning and supporting the Algebra I teacher (one teacher with 4 classes), first through collaborative lesson planning and later (as documented in the next section), by formally co-planning and co-teaching (e.g., pushing in) to support the Algebra teacher in each class.

## What Happened? How were the changes implemented?

Over the course of the school year, school leadership modified each design component in important and meaningful ways. Specifically, the school made specific shifts in: (1) how the support class and teachers were deployed; (2) the content and focus of Collab Team meetings. These shifts led to important learnings about how high school teachers can collaborate and the support they may need to do so effectively.

The school's Master Schedule was implemented as intended and time was provided for students to complete credit recovery classes/work. Preliminary data suggest that in-school credit recovery has a significantly positive impact on students' completion and learning, with nearly 60 percent of in-school credit recovery students receiving a grade of A or B compared to less than 40 percent of summer school students [see Appendix B]. Additionally, school leadership studied (via a schoolwide survey) the impact of the 6-period schedule on teachers' ability to collaborate and use support teachers. For instance, Science and History teachers also had Support Classes but did not have an additional Collab planning period. The survey data (Appendix C) demonstrates that Collab time had a significant impact on teachers' ability to plan Tier 1 instruction, review data, and effectively use Support Teachers.

**Shift #1: Reframing Support Teachers to push-in to classrooms rather than having a Support Class.**

**Shift #2: Streamlining the focus and content of Collab Team Meetings**

Initially, the Support Class/Teacher concept was envisioned as a way to allow students to complete credit recovery during the school day and as a place (e.g., a class) where students could go to receive individualized support. Most teachers had a designated period/class that open, or free time to be used as a Support Period. As noted previously, Fort Hill teachers had not had much experience working together as a team; they tended to work in isolation concentrating on their own content and students. So, while the school had an initial plan for the focus and content of Collab team time, it was unclear how quickly teachers would be able to use the Collab time effectively.

As part of the Pilot, leadership knew that “figuring out” how to deploy Support Teachers and how to effectively use Collab time would be a big part of the work.

**Mathematics.** In Math, the initial Support Class model called for support teachers to be available to assist students across different content areas during designated periods. This model proved to be overwhelming for support teachers, who struggled to provide effective help across multiple subjects and students. Given the need to improve Algebra I achievement, math teachers began to support the Algebra I teacher in developing lessons (during Collab time) and then began to “push-in” to the Algebra I classrooms, during their support period. Over the course of the year, each Algebra I class became a co-taught classroom with two teachers (one Algebra teacher and the Support teacher for that period).

The Math team shifted the content of Collab time to focus on designing strong Tier 1 Algebra instruction and providing customized in-class support to students in Algebra classrooms. As the year progressed, the Math team transitioned to 3 days of Collab time, using the other two days for co-planning and prep of individual classes in Algebra and other areas. The district Math Supervisor met regularly with the Math team throughout the year, to support teachers' use of data and the development of common assessment items.

The shift to co-planning and co-teaching in Mathematics had multiple positive impacts:

- The targeted, co-teaching model in Algebra I led to more dynamic and effective instruction.
- Teachers were able to plan together and deliver content more consistently and with greater focus.
- The quality of teacher collaboration and conversation improved, with a shared sense of urgency and purpose.
- The approach allowed for real-time support and intervention for students struggling in Algebra I.

**English.** The initial Support Class model called for support teachers to be available to assist students across different content areas during designated periods. The English team experienced many of the early challenges faced in Math but did not have the flexibility to focus on one content area or grade-level. Without a clear focus, the English team struggled to work together effectively.

The Assistant Principal, with the support of district leadership (a Literacy Coach and the Supervisor of Secondary English), continued to focus on improving Tier 1 instruction and reviewing data. Over multiple months, the English team developed the following process for Collab time and deploying student support, as described by school leadership.

- The English team set both short- and long-term goals for instructional improvement and student growth. The team used a running agenda and set norms and goals to maintain their focus. Collab time was organized so that two days (Monday/Tuesday) focused on improving core instruction, leveraging data and curricular resources and two days (Thursday/Friday) provided time for developing mini-support plans for two or three students at a time, ensuring targeted interventions without overwhelming the team.
- During the Core Instruction Collab time (Monday/Tuesday), the team focused on academics, framed by the question: What is a reasonable outcome? The work involved reviewing and incorporating instructional resources into lessons.
- During the Student Support Collab time (Thursday/Friday), the team engaged in progress monitoring with the team reviewing both whole-group and individual student data.

Leadership reported the following successes and challenges resulting from their work.

- The team developed a culture of setting and achieving clear, data-driven goals.
- Collaboration with support teachers and coaches led to more effective instructional planning and targeted student support.
- The process fostered ongoing learning and adaptation, with plans to continue refining the approach.
- Support teachers played a vital role, providing additional instructional support and helping to implement plans.

Challenges included difficulty ensuring that meetings remained focused and productive, as teachers needed time and support to learn how to make the most of collaborative time.

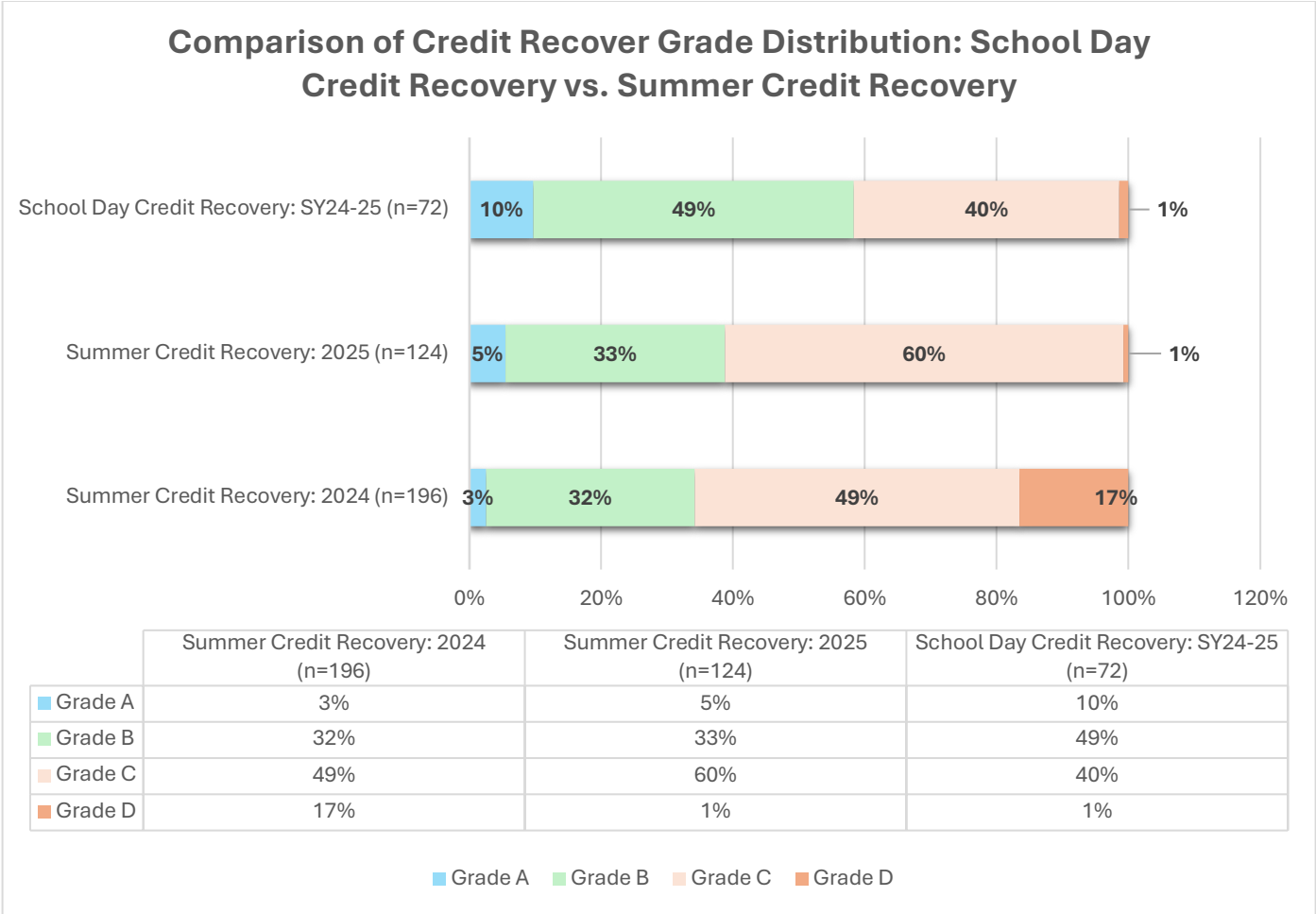
## Appendix A

### Fort Hill High School Team Planning – IN DETAIL

#### Initial Design Specifications

Focus	Design Elements - Considerations
<b>Improving Core Instruction</b>	
<p><b>Content teams meet 2x/week to directly improve core instruction.</b> These meetings are facilitated by the Department Head (Paula or April) and supported by district supervisors (Steve and Sarah) who will likely attend one or more meetings each week.</p>	
<p><b>Core Instruction Data Analysis:</b> (1) Time to review MCAP data and to review of formal assessments (e.g., MAP, unit assessments, grades); (2) Time to develop common assessments.</p>	<p>May be more intensive at BOY (e.g., 2 weeks or 4 sessions to review data) to inform foci for core instruction; then, scheduled as needed (e.g., data dives) based on assessment schedules.</p>
<p><b>Develop Curricular Resources:</b> Based on initial data analysis and ongoing formative assessments, time to: (1) develop specific curricular resources and warm up activities; (2) develop common instructional supports (cross-grade); and (3) develop and use formative assessments to support instruction and progress monitor.</p>	<p>These meetings provide time for teachers to develop weekly curricular support, resources, and adjustments to core instruction – <b>to develop and implement instructional strategies.</b></p> <p>Teams will use improvement cycles to develop instructional strategies and then test— progress monitor—the impact of these strategies on instruction.</p>
<b>Student Support</b>	
<p>Content teams meet 2x/week to determine and coordinate how the team will use the Support Period to provide academic support to identified students. This may involve how the Support Teacher works with students during this time and how students might use this time. Student Support meetings are academically focused (and may include other data) and are focused on a subset of students that: (a) need additional academic support and (b) would benefit from acceleration and positive recognition.</p>	
<p><b>Student Support Data Analysis:</b> Initial and ongoing use of screening data and ongoing assessments (including SEL data) to (1) determine which students will receive support and (2) progress monitor the impact of support.</p>	<p>Initial data analysis will be needed at BOY, using available screeners, grades, behavior data, and student input (e.g., student generated learner profiles). Teams will <b>identify a preliminary set of students for support (some for credit recovery, some for tutoring or other interventions).</b> Weekly review of student data/need may be part of weekly discussions as needs arise.</p>
<p><b>Determine and Coordinate Support:</b> Time for teacher teams to determine the specific interventions/support for individuals or groups of students and to coordinate the provision of support.</p>	<p>First, the team (with the support of administration) will <b>determine interventions and suite of supports based on students’ needs</b> (from available interventions or TBD) – this work may take 2 to 3 weeks. Then, the team will align and coordinate how the designated teacher will support students and how students use this time. Long term considerations include using the team planning time to reflect on the impact of this work, and aligning supports with career counseling, CCR pathways, and CCR Student Education Plan.</p>

## Appendix B Credit Recovery Data and Impact



## Appendix C

### Fort Hill Survey Data

#### Introduction

Fort Hill High School is implementing a Blueprint Pilot Initiative designed to increase teachers' collaborative time to engage in planning for core and tiered instruction, and to provide additional support periods for students,

To gather mid-year information on the implementation of its pilot initiative, administration administered a Teacher Survey to obtain feedback from teachers regarding their experience and perspective, focusing on how they felt about moving to 6-period schedule instead of a 7-period schedule.

#### Key Components of the Pilot Initiative

- **6-Period Schedule:** Use of a 6-period schedule that includes one 90-minute semester class.
- **Collaboration Time:** The schedule provides additional daily common planning time for Math teachers and English teachers, called Collab Team Time.
- **Support Periods:** An additional "Support" period for Math and English teachers, that provides flexible time for teachers to push-in to classrooms, provide credit recovery for students, and meet with groups of students for additional support.

The survey contained closed and open-ended questions asking teachers for their perspective on the impact of these components on teaching/instruction, student learning, and adult culture and climate.

**To inform analysis.** The following data charts and summary of open-ended responses summarize teachers' responses. The data is organized to compare the perspectives of: (1) teachers with additional collaborative time (Math and English) and teachers without additional collaborative time; (2) the perspective of Math teachers and English teachers regarding their use of collaborative time; and (3) teachers' perspectives of how the support period and 6-period schedule may impact students and teachers.

#### Table of Contents

**Charts 1 – 5** display feedback from all teachers on selected items, *comparing responses by teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.* [Pages 2 – 3]

**Charts 6 – 13** display feedback from (a) all teachers, comparing *comparing responses by teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time* and (b) teachers with collaborative time, comparing the responses of Math and English teachers. [Pages 4 – 7]

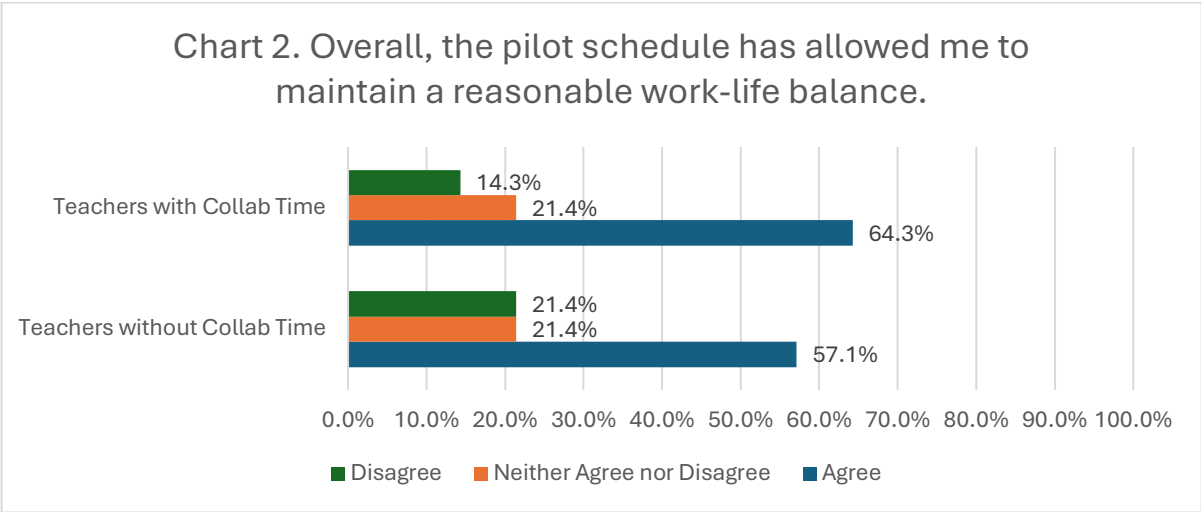
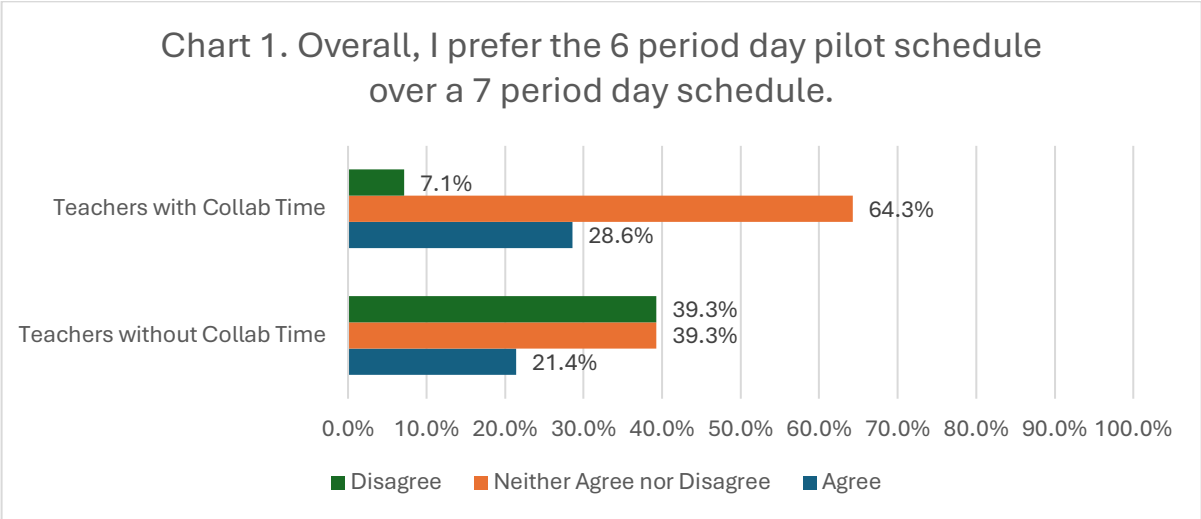
**The analysis of qualitative (open-ended responses) begins on page 8** and includes a summary generated via ChapGPT (Artificial Intelligence) for the following topics. Summaries have been reviewed and edited to enhance the clarity of the summaries.

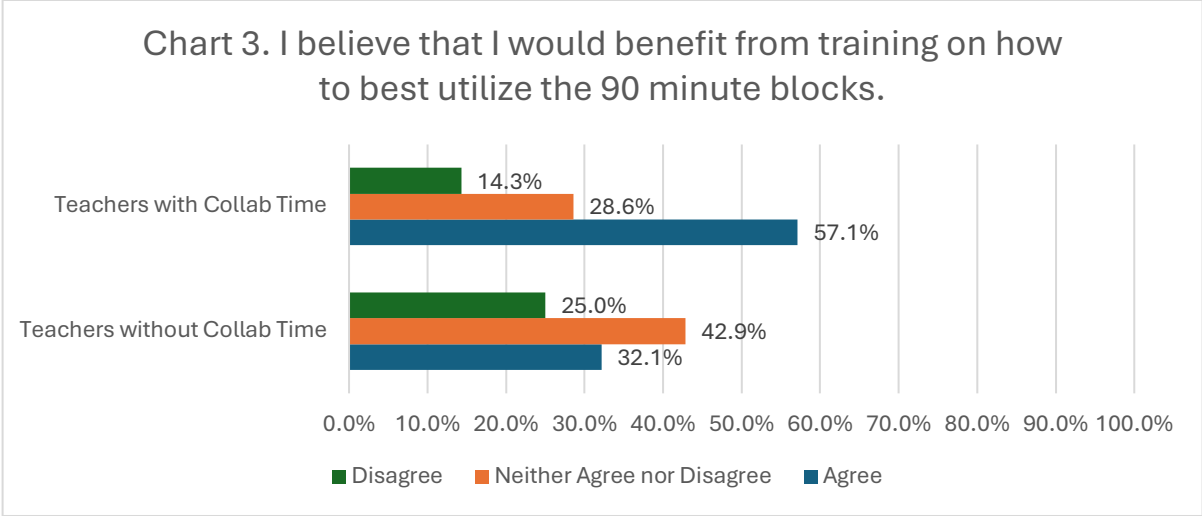
- Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives on the 6-Period Day
- Summary of Teachers' Perspectives on the Student Support Period
- Summary of Benefits and Negatives for Teachers in the 6-Period Day
- Summary of Benefits and Negatives for Students in the 6-Period Day

All Questions were developed and administered by Fort Hill High School leadership.

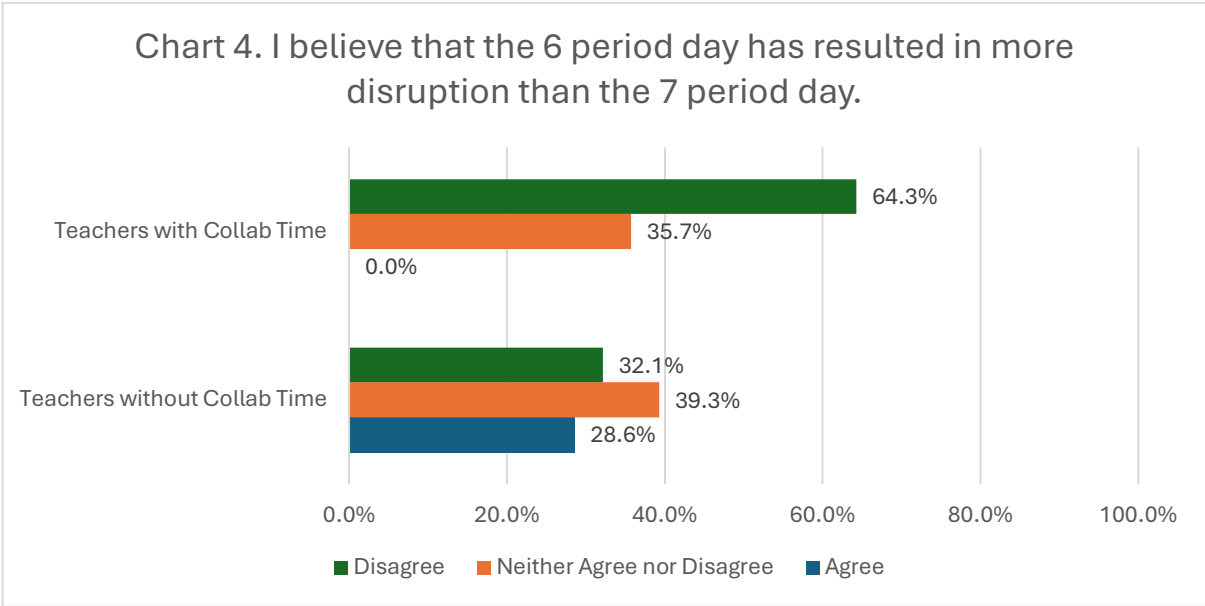
Summary charts and analysis of qualitative data provided by Brett Lane, Strategic Facilitator for Allegany County.

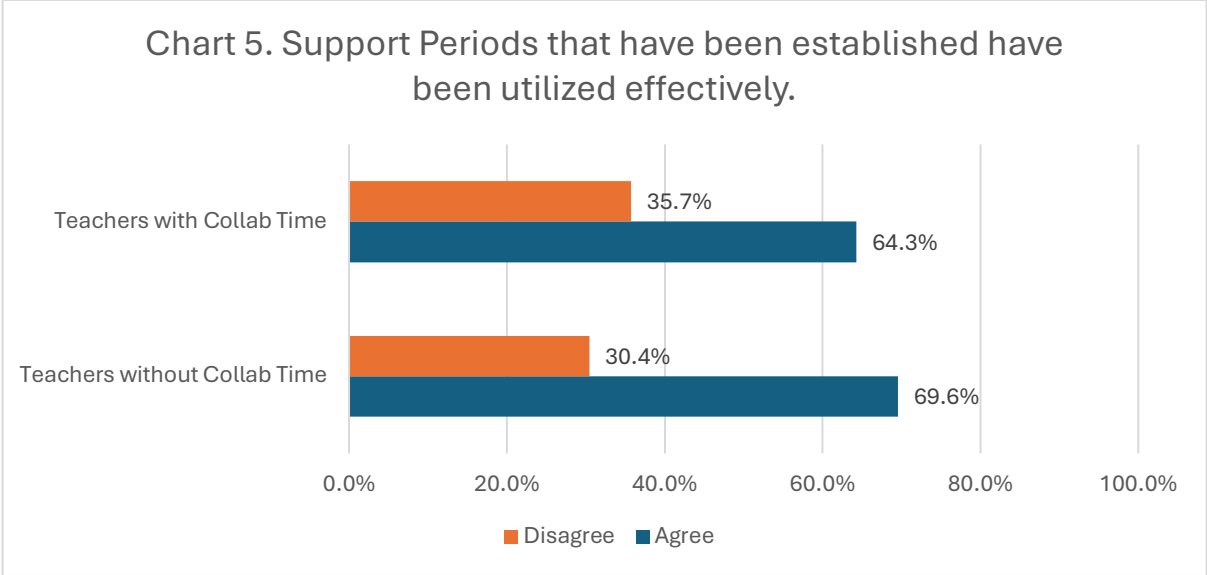
**Charts 1 – 5: Feedback from all teachers on selected items, comparing responses by teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.**





[Continued] Feedback from all teachers on selected items, comparing responses by teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.





**Charts 6 – 13**

**Feedback on the impact of the 6-period schedule on flexibility of instruction.**

Chart 6. Data for all teachers, comparing teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.

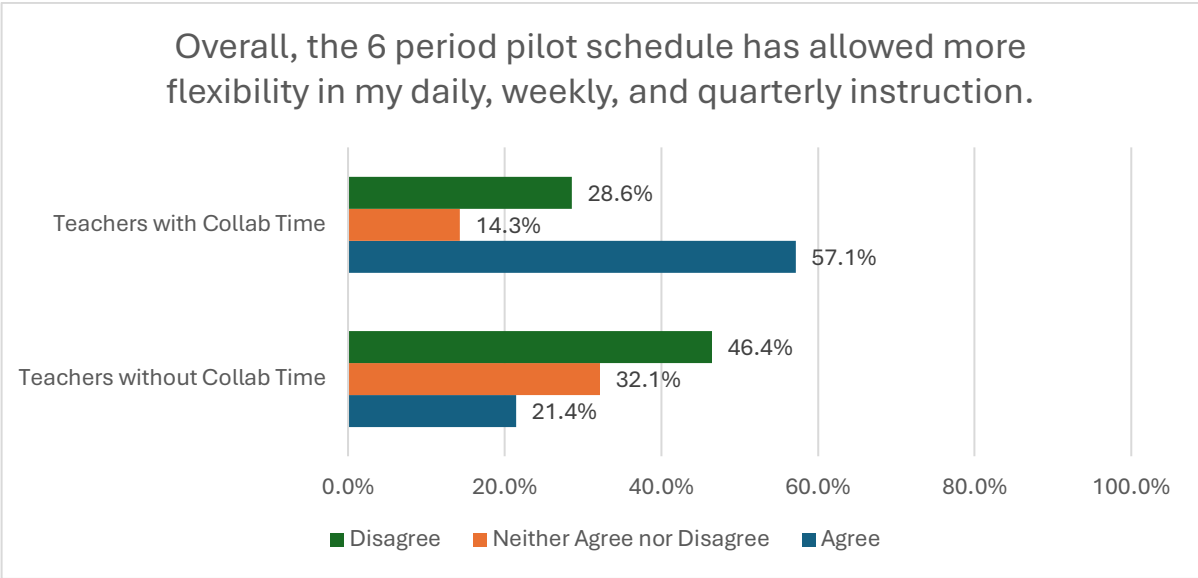
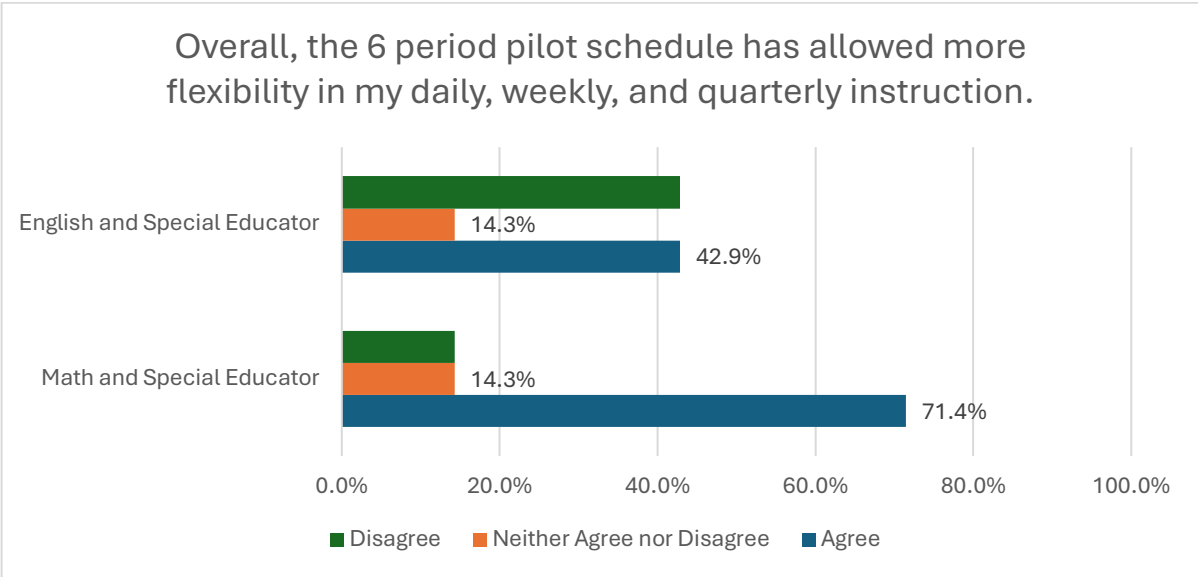


Chart 7. Data for teachers with collaboration time, comparing feedback from English teachers and Math teachers.



**Feedback on the impact of the 6-period schedule on the ability of teachers to meet deadlines.**

Chart 8. Data for all teachers, comparing teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.

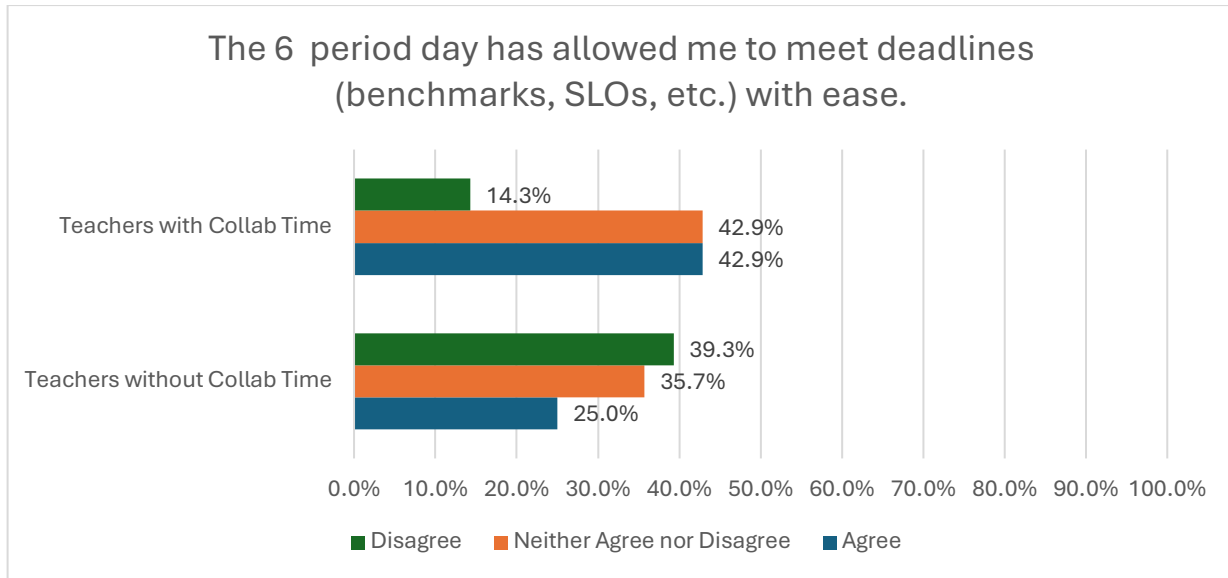
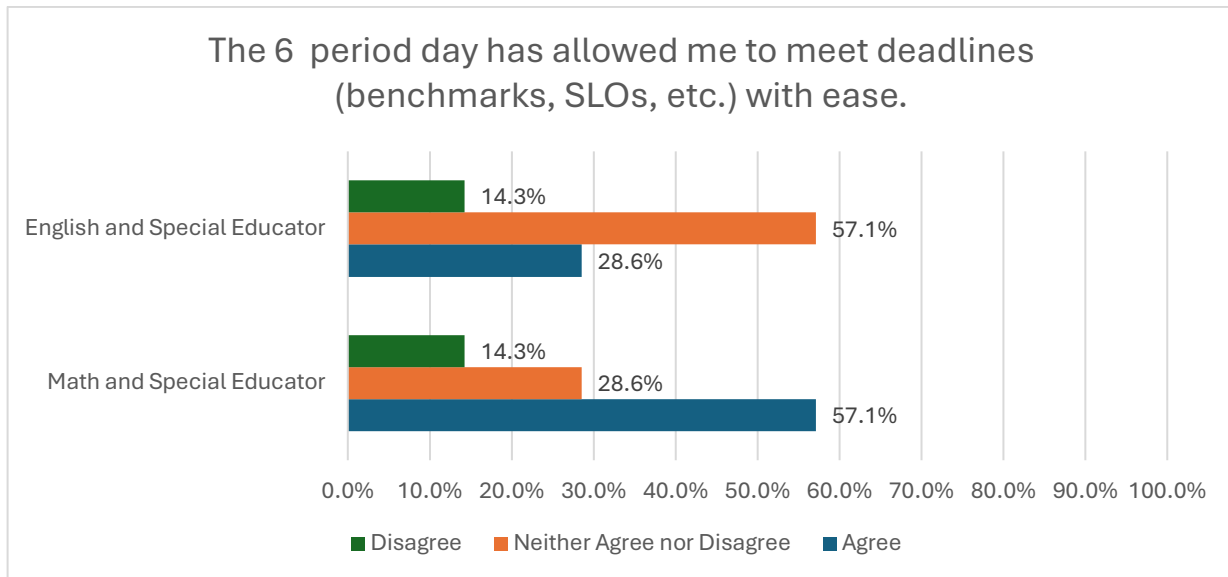


Chart 9. Data for teachers with collaboration time, comparing feedback from English teachers and Math teachers.



**Feedback on the impact of the 90-minute planning time with department colleagues, for All Math and English teachers.**

Chart 10. All Math and English Teachers

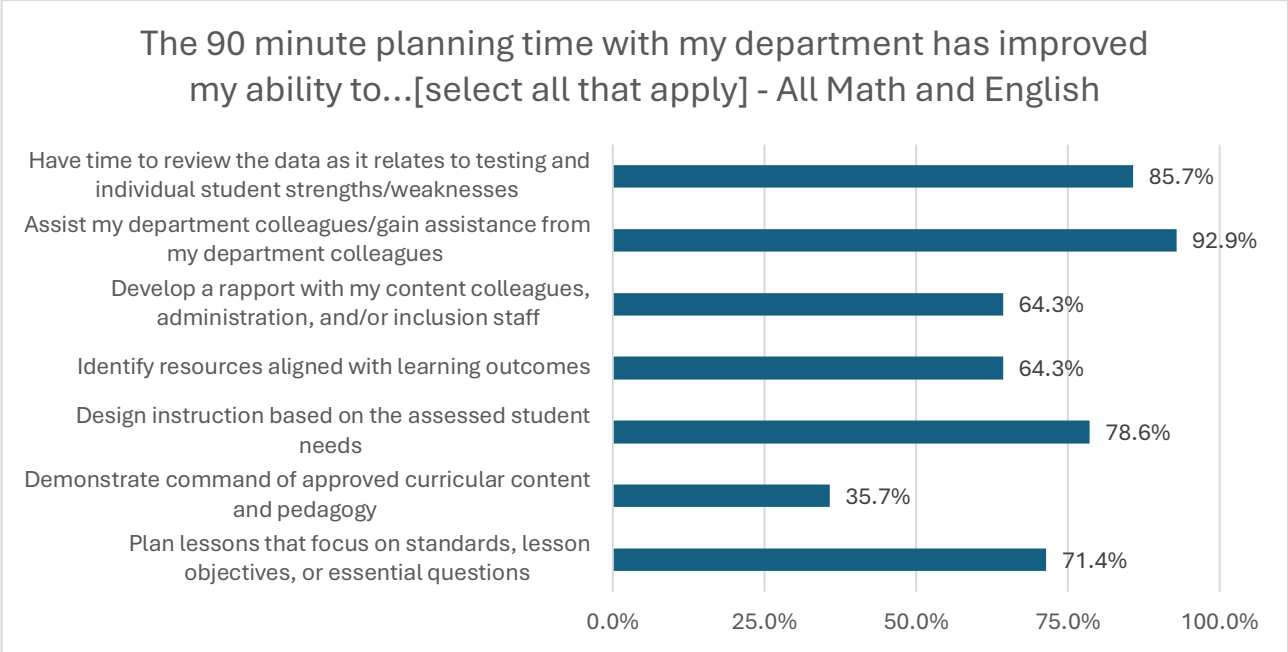
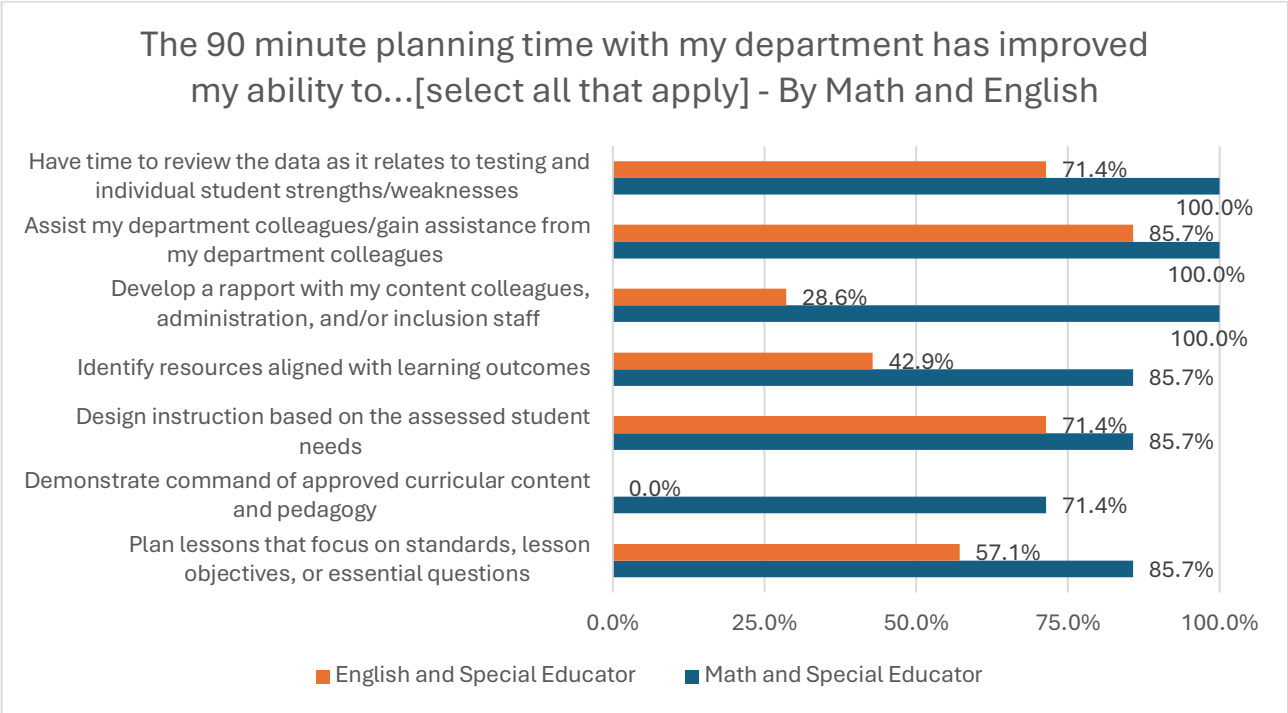


Chart 11. Comparing the perceptions of Math and English Teachers



**Feedback on the impact of the 90-minute blocks of instruction on key aspects of instruction and student learning.**

Chart 12. Data for all teachers, comparing teachers with collaboration time and teachers without collaboration time.

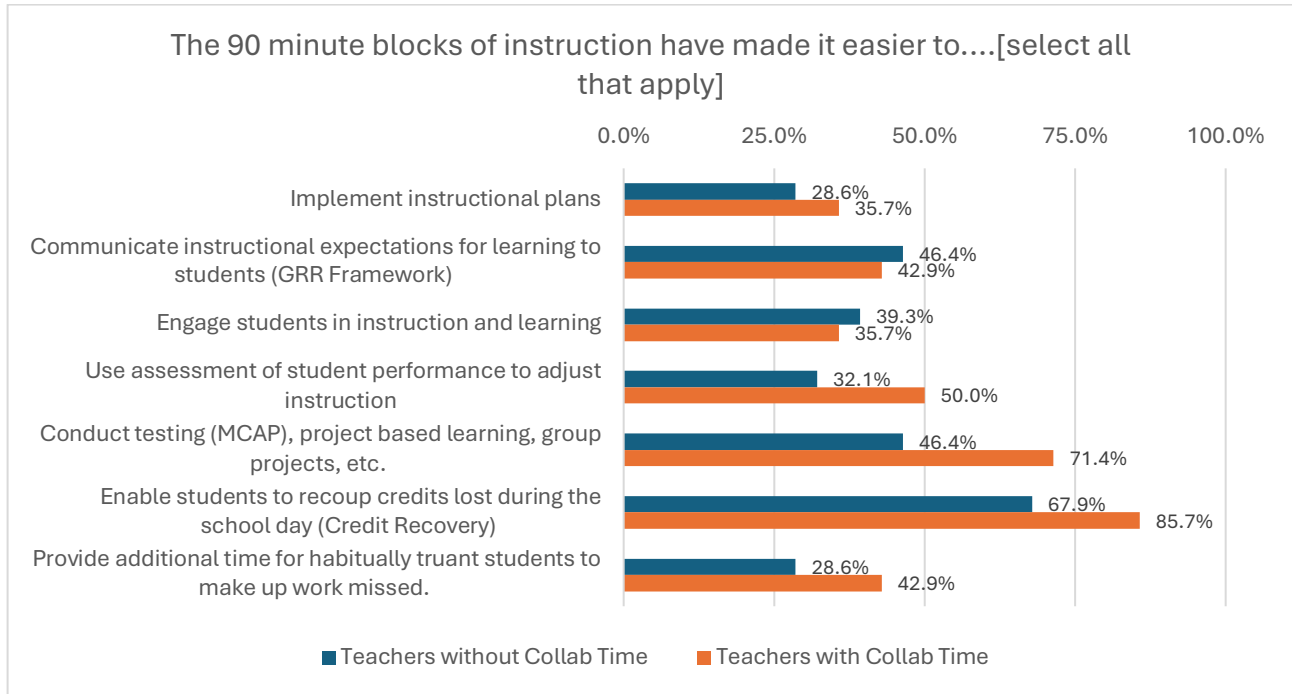
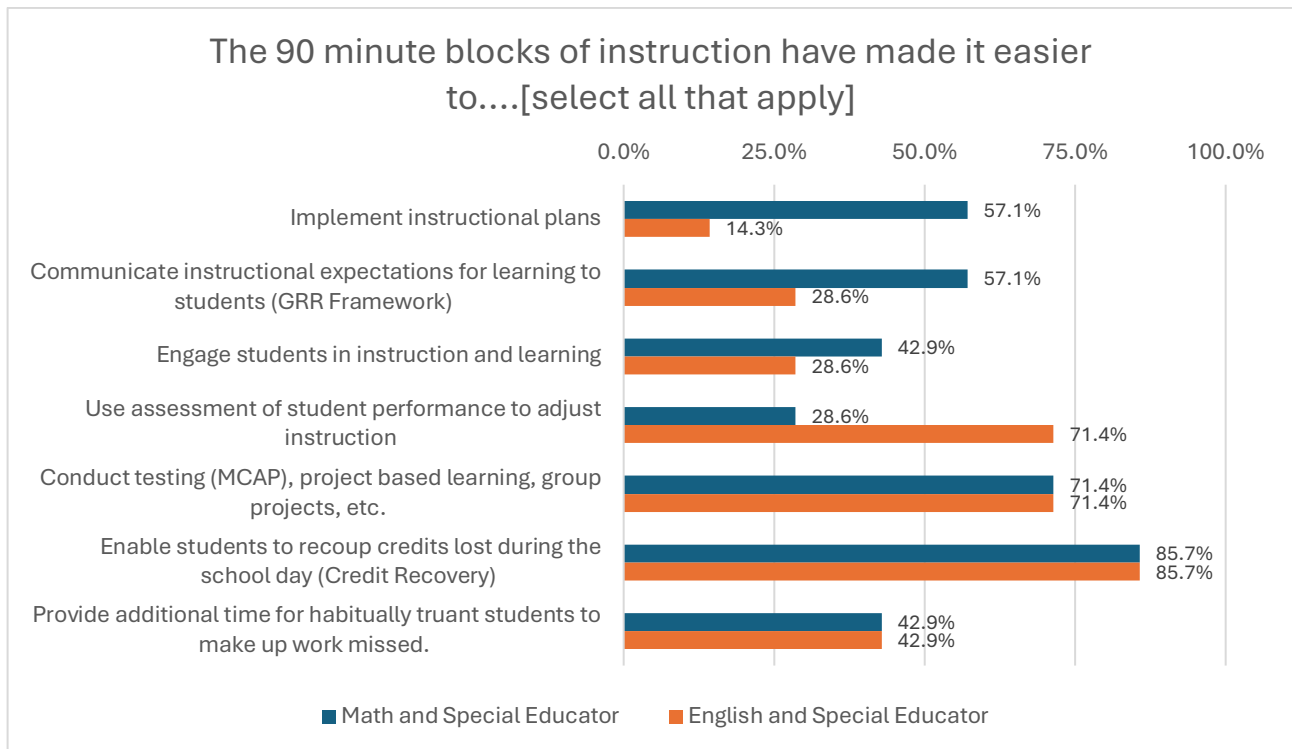


Chart 13. Comparing the perceptions of Math and English Teachers



## Qualitative Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives on the 6-Period Day

Based on **287 responses**, here are **four key themes** along with the number of responses that align with each theme:

### 1. Mixed Reactions to Longer Class Periods (43 responses)

- Some teachers found **90-minute periods beneficial for deeper instruction** and increased student engagement, especially in hands-on or project-based courses; while others struggled with **keeping students engaged** and maintaining **effective pacing**.
  - **Notably, teachers with collaborative time had more positive responses to the 6-day schedule and 90-minute class periods, compared to teachers without collaborative time.**
  - **Math teachers had consistently more positive responses to the 6-period schedule, compared to all teachers and to English teachers who also had collaborative time.**
- Several teachers **preferred a consistent schedule** rather than a mix of **45-minute and 90-minute** classes.
- Many teachers noted that **non-honors students had difficulty focusing for the entire period.**

### 2. Collaborative Planning Benefits (for Some) (26 responses)

- Teachers in **Math and English** appreciated the **daily team planning time**, which allowed them to **collaborate, analyze data, and improve instruction**.
  - **Specifically, Math teachers were consistently positive of the additional collaborative planning time compared to English teachers. The difference may be due to the content and focus of collaborative planning and how Math teachers used this time to engage in common lesson planning and organize the use of support periods.**
- Some teachers mentioned that **collaborative planning improved their work-life balance.**

### 3. Increased Course Opportunities for Students (17 responses)

- Teachers acknowledged the benefit of students being able to take **8 courses per year**, allowing for **more elective choices, advanced coursework, and credit recovery options.**
- This was seen as a **benefit for students who needed to catch up on credits or explore more subjects.**
- Some teachers noted that this schedule could help **students stay on track for graduation** and improve overall academic opportunities.

### 4. Challenges with Pacing and Course Structure (7 responses)

- Teachers expressed **concerns about AP and MCAP-tested courses**, stating that the **semester-long format felt rushed.**
- Teachers worried about **rushed instruction, limited review time, and lower student performance on standardized tests.**
- Some noted that semester courses resulted in **uneven course pacing, making it difficult to reuse lesson plans or provide consistency.**

#### Conclusion:

Teachers had **divided opinions** on the 6-period day. Math and English teacher generally **saw benefits in collaborative planning and the 90-minute classes**, others **struggled with pacing and student engagement in longer class periods.**

## Summary of Teachers' Perspectives on the Student Support Period

Math and English teachers (and their students) were the primary users of support periods. Six of the seven Math teachers agreed that the support periods were useful, while only three (3) English teachers agreed that the support periods were well utilized. The comments (summarized below) illustrate some of the key strengths, concerns, and suggestions for improvement. Teacher responses and comments suggest having support periods (for teachers to push-in and provide targeted support to students) can be an effective method for supporting students when organized and thoughtfully planned and accompanied by appropriate staffing.

### General Perception

- Some teachers were **unsure about the effectiveness** of the support periods, with several stating that they **did not have enough information** or experience with it to form an opinion.
- A few teachers questioned whether students were **truly benefiting** from support periods, raising concerns about students **using the time unproductively** (e.g., sitting in study hall without direct instruction).
- Others acknowledged that support periods were being **effectively used in certain subjects, particularly math and English**, to provide tutoring, test prep, and remediation.

### Effectiveness & Challenges

- Some teachers **found support periods helpful**, particularly for assisting students with **test preparation, makeup work, and accommodation**.
- Others **struggled to utilize support teachers effectively**, either because they were assigned during **planning periods rather than instructional time** or because the **students who needed help were not available** when support was provided.
- Several teachers noted that **certain departments, such as arts, PE, tech, and health, did not benefit as much** from the support system.

### Suggestions for Improvement

- **Better Scheduling** – Teachers suggested aligning **support periods with academic and inclusion courses** to ensure struggling students receive help when they need it.
- **More Equitable Distribution** – Some teachers felt that support periods were **not fairly distributed**, with some having multiple support periods while others had none.
- **More Structure & Clarification** – Some teachers wanted **clearer guidelines on how support teachers should be utilized**, as some felt uncomfortable asking for help or were unsure of their role.
- **Expanding Support to All Departments** – Teachers recommended ensuring that **support was available across all subjects, not just math and English**.

### Conclusion

Teachers had **mixed opinions on the usefulness of the support period**. While some found it valuable for student remediation and support, others felt that it was **inequitably distributed, underutilized, or lacked proper scheduling to be effective**. Many suggested **improvements in structure, scheduling, and accessibility** to maximize its impact.

## Summary of Benefits and Negatives for Teachers in the 6-Period Day

### Benefits for Teachers

1. **More Opportunities for Student Success**
  - Teachers appreciated that students could take up to **8 courses per year**, allowing for **more elective choices, credit recovery, and advanced coursework**.
  - This helped struggling students **catch up on credits** and provided high-achieving students with **more academic opportunities**.
2. **Collaborative Planning Time (for Some Teachers)**
  - **Math and English teachers benefitted from daily team planning**, which allowed for **collaboration, data analysis, and instructional improvements**.
  - Teachers valued the ability to **share ideas, discuss curriculum, and align instruction across the department**.
3. **Fewer Classes to Teach Per Day**
  - Teaching **fewer classes per day** (compared to a 7-period schedule) allowed for **longer instructional time and potentially deeper engagement with students**.
  - Some teachers found it **easier to plan for fewer class periods each day**.
4. **Flexibility in Instruction**
  - Longer class periods **allowed for more hands-on activities, group work, and in-depth instruction** without frequent interruptions.
  - Teachers could **pace lessons differently** based on student needs.

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### Negatives for Teachers

1. **Increased Workload and Planning Burden**
  - Many teachers reported **having more preps** (teaching multiple versions of the same course in different formats—45-minute vs. 90-minute).
  - Some had to **restructure lesson plans** to fit semester-long courses, adding to their workload.
  - Grading was **more intensive**, especially with different course lengths and multiple new groups of students throughout the year.
2. **Challenges with 90-Minute Classes**
  - **Keeping students engaged** for 90 minutes was difficult, particularly in **non-honors or inclusion classes**.
  - Some teachers felt that students **struggled with focus and retention** in longer periods.
3. **Pacing Issues for AP and State-Tested Courses**
  - Many teachers **struggled to cover all required content** in a semester for courses like **AP, MCAP-tested classes, and other high-stakes subjects**.
  - **Limited review time before standardized exams** led to concerns about **lower student performance**.
  - Some teachers preferred **year-long AP and tested courses** rather than a semester schedule.
4. **Inequities in Planning and Support Time**
  - Some teachers **did not receive additional planning time**.
  - Certain subjects, especially **math and English, received more structured support**, while others had **limited or no additional assistance**.
  - Some teachers felt that **their planning time was reduced** due to required team meetings.

### Conclusion:

While teachers acknowledged benefits such as **student opportunities, fewer daily class transitions, and collaborative planning for some**, they also faced **greater planning challenges, difficulties with 90-minute periods, and concerns about pacing for semester-based courses**. Many suggested **adjustments to scheduling, planning time, and course structures** to improve the system.

## Summary of Benefits and Negatives for Students in the 6-Period Day

### Benefits for Students

#### 1. Increased Course Opportunities

- Students could **earn up to 8 credits per year**, allowing them to take **more electives, advanced courses, or dual enrollment classes**.
- This gave students greater **flexibility in course selection** and **the ability to explore different subjects, including career and technical education**.

#### 2. Credit Recovery & Graduation Support

- Struggling students had **more opportunities to make up failed courses** and stay on track.
- The ability to retake classes within the same school year was particularly helpful for students at risk of falling behind.

#### 3. Longer Class Periods for Deeper Learning

- Some students benefited from **longer class periods that allowed for more hands-on learning, group work, and in-depth instruction**.
- Certain subjects, such as **math and science**, could **incorporate more problem-solving and lab activities**.

#### 4. College and Career Readiness

- The semester-based structure mimicked a **college-style schedule**, potentially **preparing students for future academic environments**.
- Some students could **complete prerequisites more quickly** and move on to **higher-level courses earlier**.

### Negatives for Students

#### 1. Struggles with 90-Minute Classes

- Many students found it **difficult to focus and stay engaged for the entire 90-minute period**.
- Non-honors and inclusion students, in particular, **struggled with attention spans and motivation**.
- Some students **felt overwhelmed** by the amount of content covered in a single class period.

#### 2. Pacing Challenges & Gaps in Learning

- Students taking **semester-based AP or tested courses (e.g., MCAP subjects)** often **felt rushed** and lacked enough time for review.
- Those who had a subject **first semester and not again until the next school year** faced **retention issues** (e.g., having math or English in fall but not again until the following year).
- If a student **failed one quarter, they had limited time to recover their grade** compared to a full-year course.

#### 3. Difficulties Catching Up After Absences

- Missing a single 90-minute class meant **missing the equivalent of two traditional class periods**, making it harder to stay on track.
- Students with **poor attendance struggled significantly**, especially in fast-paced courses.
- The lack of a dedicated study hall period made **making up work and getting extra help more difficult**.

#### 4. Fewer Opportunities for Extracurricular Engagement

- Without a **study hall or flexible break period**, students had **less time for clubs, tutoring, or extracurricular meetings**.
- Some students felt **overloaded with assignments** and struggled to balance coursework with other responsibilities.

### Conclusion:

The 6-period schedule **offered clear benefits for credit recovery, elective opportunities, and college readiness**, but **the challenges of long class periods, fast pacing, and difficulty catching up after absences** created significant obstacles for some students. Many students benefited academically, but others struggled with **focus, workload, and retention of material**.