

Worcester Leadership Network

Spotlight Practices Brief

Accelerating Student Achievement
Three Stories from Worcester Public Schools

February 2023

This Practice Brief provides case narratives describing how schools have engaged in accelerated improvement and shares common insights gained from an analysis of how three schools accelerated student achievement through a deliberate and concerted improvement effort.

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Special thanks given to the educators who contributed to this Practice Brief.

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Worcester Leadership Network

The *Leadership Network* is a community of leaders from all Worcester schools and district leaders focused on building leadership capacity and improving classroom instruction, leading to improved student achievement among all students.

The *Network* serves as an in-district learning community for designing, testing, and refining tools, strategies, and actions that schools can immediately implement. It does so by providing dedicated time and space for school and district leaders to work together on shared Problems of Practice that are linked to common professional development and guided by shared principles and goals.

Leadership Network Composition

The Network is comprised of three grade-level networks: an Elementary School Network, a Middle School Network, and a High School Network. Each Network meets together five times a year, supplemented by opportunities for small cohorts to meet virtually or asynchronously around specific problems of practice and inquiry questions. Each school team includes the principal, focused instructional coaches, and additional school leaders. District leaders include the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and Leadership, and Managers of Instructional Leadership, Curriculum and Professional Learning, and Education Technology.

Leadership Network History and Accomplishments

The first Leadership Network Session was held in the fall of the 2018-19 school year. Prior to 2018-19, district leaders had regularly convened a network of elementary school principals from priority schools. Recognizing the potential for sharing practices and learning across schools, district leaders worked with INSTLL as a thought partner to develop a multi-year Leadership Network to include and support all schools. All Leadership Network sessions are co-developed by INSTLL and district leaders and facilitated by INSTLL staff.

Network Accomplishments

- Over four years (2018-19 to 2022-23), the Leadership Network grew to include all schools from all grade-levels and broaden participation to include leadership teams from each school.
- A collaborative Instructional Walkthrough Tool that defines high-quality instruction was developed and is actively used by school leaders to monitor and provide feedback on classroom instruction.
- District-led cross-school walkthroughs are conducted multiple times each year, providing opportunities for schools to learn from each other, receive feedback, and to highlight instructional best practices.
- Schools are individually and collectively focused on using the Turnaround Practices (Accelerated Practices) to develop improvement plans, implement and test change practices (e.g., strategies), and to make mid-course adjustments (every 90 days) based on an analysis of data and Network sharing.

Impact on Student Achievement: 2021-22 School Year MCAS

Focusing on achievement gains made by schools from 2020-21 to 2021-22:

- 84 percent of Worcester's elementary and middle schools outperformed the state's gain in Math.
- 71 percent of Worcester's elementary and middle schools outperformed the state's loss in ELA.

Guiding Principles

We use the **Turnaround Practices for Accelerated Improvement** and the district's **Coherence Framework** as foundational research on effective practices for school improvement.

We employ a **Network Approach** as the mechanism for engaging leaders across the system: to deliver professional development; to build upon existing expertise; and to design, implement, and share effective practice- and research-based practices.

We strive to build leaders' capacity to **directly impact and improve teachers' instructional practices**.

Institutionalizing and Sustaining Accelerated Improvement: 2022-23 School Year

Our focus for the 2022-23 school year is to continue to leverage the Leadership Network to build the capacity of leaders and teachers, so that leaders have the skill and knowledge to lead, develop, and refine systems for an inclusive and integrated learning environment with educators, families, and support staff. Our overarching goal remains focused on dramatically improving classroom instruction, leading to improved student achievement, closing of achievement gaps, and ensuring that students are prepared for college and career.

Acceleration and Support post-Covid 19

The 2021-22 school year was incredibly difficult for all—for students, teachers and educators, leaders, and parents and caregivers. In 2020-21, most schools provided remote instruction for the majority of the school year, with not-unanticipated negative impacts on students’ academic performance and social-emotional well-being. In 2021-22, students and teachers mostly returned to full time in-person learning. For many, this school year was more challenging and traumatic than the previous year. Yet in the face of multiple challenges, many schools in Worcester were able to accelerate students’ learning. And Worcester outpaced achievement gains in comparison to the state and to comparable urban districts.

	Grades 3-8 ELA Effect Size 2020-21 to 2021-22				Grades 3-8 Math Effect Size 2020-21 to 2021-22			
	2021 SS	2022 SS	Gain/Loss	Effect Size	2021 SS	2022 SS	Gain/Loss	Effect Size
	STATEWIDE	496.5	494.2	-2.3	-0.22	489.7	493.5	3.8
Worcester	485.8	485.2	-0.6	-0.06	477.0	482.9	5.9	0.49

Formalizing the Spotlight Practices Project.

During the spring and early summer of 2022, INSTLL and Worcester Public School leaders reviewed STAR Renaissance data and identified schools that had made accelerated and substantial gains in accelerating student achievement in ELA and Math. Prior to analyzing the data, we had anecdotal evidence (from our work with school leaders and the cross-school walkthroughs) of improvement. The analysis of STAR data (subsequently confirmed by state MCAS data in fall 2023), validated our hunches and clearly identified potential “practices” that had accelerated improvement.

We conceived the idea of documenting and shining a light on these practices, towards the goal of accelerating these practices across schools. In planning the 2022-23 Leadership Network project plan, we designed the Spotlight Practices Project so that the case narratives of three schools would be ready to share by February 2023. Overall, we made four strategic shifts to the Leadership Network, to focus efforts, leverage emerging successes with acceleration, and to provide support to principals and schools.

1. **Spotlight Schools Project.** Documentation of organizational, leadership, and instructional practices leading to accelerated student achievement and learning.
2. **Organization.** Leadership Network sessions were changed to include all schools as a single network, that would meet together in-person for 2.5 hours every two months. This shift was taken to reduce the amount of time principals and staff would be out of their schools.
3. **Focus Priorities.** Leadership Network sessions focused on two data-informed priorities linked to school growth plans: (a) to improve the quality and delivery of standards-based and culturally relevant instruction; and (b) to improve school-level teaming practices and the use of data to inform core and student-specific instruction, including establishing high functioning ILTs.
4. **Instructional and Teaming Frameworks.** We expanded cross-school walkthroughs to include more schools and increased opportunities for sharing; schools continued to use the *Instructional Walkthrough Tool*; and leaders were invited to inform the development of a *Framework for Effective Teaming*.

Purpose of the Spotlight Practices Project

The goal of the Spotlight Practices Project is to document and share effective school-based practices that schools, school leaders, and teachers have implemented and that contribute to accelerated student learning.

This Spotlight Practice Brief provides specific examples and practical guidance that leaders may use to plan for and implement improvement efforts in schools across the district. As part of Worcester’s Leadership Network Initiative, **Spotlight Practices** are intended to be used, borrowed, enhanced, adopted, and applied in various contexts across the district, towards the goal improving teaching and learning.

Reflection and Application. Schools are encouraged to use this Practice Brief to reflect upon their own improvement efforts and consider ways to apply this information to their own context and work.

Study Overview

Each school was identified as having made significant and positive gains in student achievement during the 2021-2022 school year directly connected to improvement efforts and specific practices employed by school leadership. Upon request of the Worcester Public Schools, the INSTLL team spent a day on-site at each school interviewing school leadership and educators about their concerted efforts to raise student achievement in each area the previous year.

Upon review of all communication, inclusive of the transcripts of each meeting, the INSTLL team arrived at a set of **Leadership Moves and Actions** that were consistently identified across multiple schools as having had a significant impact on students’ growth and achievement. We then developed three **Case Narratives** that depict the work at each school, which were reviewed by school leaders for accuracy and content.

Organization

First, we share **Case Narratives** of each school, which provide detailed information and descriptions, including links to artifacts and examples, that illustrate precisely how each school accomplished its aim. Each case is organized according to the following questions:

Organizing Questions

What did the school aim to accomplish?	In which we explore how school leadership identified an instructional focus, galvanized collective urgency for change around a compelling mission and vision, and garnered buy-in and support.
What were the school-based practices that the school implemented that led to improvement?	In which we detail the distinguishing components, features, and aspects of what the school has put into practice, and that are seen as contributing to accelerated growth.
How did leadership go about accomplishing its aim?	In which we describe the key implementation actions that school leaders took, such as strategic planning, making good use of evidence-based practices, actively using data, and supporting teachers and educators.

Second, we share a set of **Leadership Moves and Leadership Actions** taken by school leaders. Leadership Actions and Moves are drawn from evidence from two or three of the schools and provide a starting point for considering how to approach accelerated improvement across multiple content areas and grade spans.

BY THE NUMBERS

Before illustrating how each of these components are exemplified in the work of each school, we share the student achievement data that led the district and INSTLL to identify each school.

Chandler Magnet School (K-6)

	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Multi-Race
Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	4.5%	0.1%	75.9%	15.9%	2.2%
	FLNE	ELL	Low-Income	SWD	High Need
Selected Populations	80.1%	54.0%	69.7%	16.4%	84.8%
	ELA		Math		
	2021	2022	2021	2022	
% meeting or exceeding	16.0%	22.0%	11.0%	24.0%	
Scaled Score	474	482 .76	470	484 1.17	
SGP		60.7		62.6	
STATE Scaled Score	497	494 -.22	490	493 .32	
STAR Gain - BOY to EOY		46		54.6	

Belmont Street Community School (K-6)

	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Multi-Race
	18.3%	3.8%	53.8%	20.2%	3.8%
	FLNE	ELL	Low-Income	SWD	High Need
	67.2%	44.8%	87.9%	17.9%	94.4%
	ELA		Math		
	2021	2022	2021	2022	
	17.0%	16.0%	7.0%	23.0%	
	479	480 .10	470	484 1.17	
		57.2		60.6	
	497	494 -.22	490	493 .32	
		54.2		60.5	

University Park Campus School (7-12) Demographics and Assessments

	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Multi-Race
Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity	13.4%	14.3%	55.4%	12.9%	4.0%

	FLNE	ELL	Low-Income	SWD	High Need
Selected Populations	70.5%	19.2%	74.6%	12.5%	82.6%

Grade 7-8

	ELA		Math		
	2021	2022	2021	2022	
% meeting or exceeding	9.0%	24.0%	17.0%	26.0%	
Scaled Score	480	481 .10	481	487 .50	
State Scaled Score	497	494 -.22	490	493 .32	
*AP Course Taking Rate	UPCS	Doher-ty	Tech	North	South
2021-22	57.1%	35.7%	24.9%	18.9%	26.0%

Effect Size is listed in Red below the Scaled Score. The Effect Size used here is a standardized effect size derived from the difference between a school's scaled score in 2022 and 2021, divided by the standard deviation of all scaled scores in 2022. It is a way to quantify the Strength of Gains or Losses made from one year to the next.

Effect Size

Small	Medium	Large	Very Large
.2 to .4	.4 to .6	.6 to 1.0	Over 1.0

*AP Course Taking Rate=# of Exams Taken divided by # of 9-12 Students

Belmont Street Community School

Accelerating Student Achievement in Math

WHAT DID THE SCHOOL AIM TO ACCOMPLISH?

Belmont Community School’s story demonstrates how a school community can initiate change and make significant improvements over the course of one year, aiming to improve math achievement and develop students as mathematical agents and doers of math. The school’s success stems from a productive union of three things: (1) an influx of new expertise and passion for math provided by an interim principal; (2) a shared need to accelerate students’ learning due to a year of remote learning; and (3) existing teacher capacity capable of engaging in improvement towards a common goal.

Expertise – Student Need – Teacher Capacity

Ellen Moynihan was asked to be the Interim Principal of Belmont Community School about two weeks prior to the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, as the current principal went on medical leave. Ellen came to Belmont Community with significant expertise in research-based math practices and experience implementing math programs and practices, including schoolwide improvement, as a teacher, coach, and leader in multiple school settings. It was a fortunate match as Belmont had a staff that for years committed themselves to improving their teaching practices through a very strong culture of collaboration, with teams meeting often beyond their formal collaboration time to plan lessons and refine their curriculum.

Upon beginning her work with Belmont Community leadership and teachers (in the two weeks leading up to the start of school), Ellen shared her vision for a comprehensive math improvement effort that would directly address students’ learning loss during the 2020-21 school year. Students had not fared well during remote learning and there was an urgency to accelerate student learning across all grades. A review of data, including MCAS and fall STAR data, justified the focus on math. And current school leaders and teachers welcomed the focus and guidance regarding specific math practices that might help them address what they knew was an urgent need. Ellen and school leadership rallied to introduce and subsequently implement a school-wide effort to dramatically shift the focus to the acceleration of students’ math proficiency.

Students as Mathematical Agents and Doers of Math

Improving student achievement in math, as measured by state and district assessments, is a logical measure of success. Belmont’s leadership and teachers had a laser-like focus on improving student achievement and demonstrating growth compared to other schools in the district and the state. However, Belmont leadership articulated a more compelling and transformative aim that guided their work and actions—to ensure that students actively believe and see themselves as “mathematicians” – that they are mathematical agents and doers of math. Guided by this aim, the question for leaders and staff was how to build this way of thinking into the structures and practices of teachers’ day-to-day instruction, interactions within and among students, and embedded within the culture of the school community.

We want all of our students to think of themselves as mathematicians and to be competitive with other students in the United States and in a global society.

Problem of Practice: How can we develop all students as mathematical agents and doers of math?

- How can we broaden the purpose of learning Mathematics and ensure that every student has the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to our community of mathematical learners?
- How can we create equitable structures in mathematics?

WHAT WERE THE SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES THAT THE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTED THAT CONTRIBUTED TO ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENT?

The following describes the key features and components of the **Mathematics Acceleration Blueprint**, as a model for improving math instruction. Considerations for how to implement this model are provide in the next section.

Key features and components of the Mathematics Acceleration Blueprint

Cultivate and Communicate a Math Culture so that all students are confident doers of math.

“We are all Mathematicians”: As a theme and as part of the vision of the school, all educators state and re-state this phrase every day, to students during the mathematics block and throughout the day. Leaders and teachers use every opportunity to tell students that they are all mathematicians, during morning and afternoon announcements, before and after school, and in all content areas. Specifically, expectations for students regarding math are stated daily, in morning announcements and in classrooms.

Mission and Vision visible everywhere: To reinforce the idea that all students are capable doers of math, leaders and teachers employ multiple strategies designed to present mathematics as meaningful and attainable for all students. For instance, descriptions and posters of famous mathematicians (particularly African American, Women, and Hispanic individuals) are shared, highlighted, and visible. The school mission and vision are posted in all classrooms. And opportunities to connect mathematics with real-world activities, work, technology (e.g., robotics) are leveraged weekly.

Co-construct norms for math classrooms with students, reinforced through training with teachers: At the beginning of the year, students in each grade and class are asked to describe what they would expect to see in a math classroom and “how would I know it was a math class.” These student generated norms are used as a baseline assessment that leaders and teachers use to guide and assess efforts to improve classroom instruction, student engagement, and classroom environment. Additionally, a set of co-constructed norms (e.g., “everyone can learn math to the highest levels, mistakes are valuable”) are agreed upon and posted in student-friendly language in all classrooms. And then, at the end of the year students are again asked to describe what they expect to see in a math class, with their responses providing evidence of changes in culture and teacher practice.

Coherent and Flexible Instructional Planning and Delivery

Grade-level focus standards for mastery: Each grade-level is directed to craft lessons and provide instruction on specific focus, or “power” standards, as determined by leadership and detailed in “The Common Core Mathematics Companion: The Standards Decoded.”

Flexible Instructional Planning: Teachers adjust lessons and are encouraged to supplement the Envisions curriculum with specific instructional strategies that: (a) align with the focus standards and (b) increase student engagement and use of the 8 effective mathematics teaching practices. The instructional strategies that teachers use to adapt their lessons are drawn from external evidence-based resources and four specific strategies, which are included in all math lessons.

Instructional Strategies	Source (examples)
Number routines	Howard County (MD) Henrico County (VA)
Identifying misconceptions	Common Core Companion
Asking effective questions	Marian Small’s Good Questions Parallel Tasks/Open Ended Questions
Closure routines	Howard County

Highly organized math instruction block: All teachers have a daily 90-minute math block. The instruction typically follows the following schedule:

Opening – 10 minutes: Number routine, fluency practice, warm up connected to lesson.

Direct Instruction – 35 minutes: Teachers state expectations and standards in kid-friendly language, followed by direct instruction and modeling of the math practice or skill.

Small Group Instruction – 40 minutes: Students work in small groups on activities directly linked to the objective and instruction provided, with the teacher pulling tiered groups and students as appropriate.

Closure Routine – 5 minutes

Grade-level Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning among teachers is crucial. Teaming includes *formal Component Team Meetings* held once a week and *informal Team Planning* that grade-level teams use to develop lessons and prepare for instruction.

Component Meetings: These meetings are a key mechanism for teachers to collaboratively refine, update, and adjust their weekly lessons drawing upon recent professional development and the instructional strategies provided by school leadership. The full administrative team attends each component meeting, so that teachers and leaders work with each other (e.g., ask questions, problem solve, consider adaptations) to refine lessons.

The agenda and focus of component meetings often stem from the previous week’s staff meeting, especially if specific math strategies were introduced. Staff development days (2x/month) are used to roll-out key instructional strategies. Then, component meetings are used to support teachers in applying these strategies in lessons. Subsequent component meetings may be used to assess the impact of strategies and adjust.

Informal Team Planning: Grade-level teachers work collaboratively to finalize shared lesson plans that are submitted to leadership on a weekly basis. Collaborative planning among teachers is standard operating procedure at Belmont Community.

Materials and Structures to support students as Mathematical Agents

Leadership ensures that all teachers and students have access to and use a consistent set of resources, evidence-based practices, and materials. Non-negotiable expectations and resources are provided, which teachers are expected to incorporate into lessons (e.g., focusing on power standards, using math tool kits provided to all students, incorporating number lines into lessons, and using a common lesson planning template). Yet teachers are encouraged to adapt their lessons and have flexibility to craft their lessons and instruction by choosing appropriate number routines, developing effective questions for students, and employing different math games and number play as needed.

- Grade-level focus standards and access to the Common Core Mathematics Companion.
- Number routines – Video and digital resources
- Book Study – Marian Small’s Good Questions
- Math tool kits for all students.
- Number lines, math tool kits, math games, number play, manipulatives.

Before the Bell - Morning Mathematics

Up to 60 students from multiple grades participate in a Morning Mathematics Program. Students engage in fun and interactive “[math games](#),” supported by educators who often target math games to skills students may be working on during their math class. Educators reach out to and work with classroom teachers to

identify student-specific skills that may be emphasized with students during this enrichment opportunity, which is voluntary.

Equitable Structures and Expectations that promote shared accountability.

The components, resources, and materials described above are necessary, but not sufficient, ingredients for an effective schoolwide improvement effort. Fostering and sustaining internal accountability—in which a school moves from being a collection of individuals with different beliefs to an organization with shared beliefs and expectations—is the catalyst that leads to effective improvement. Belmont Community leadership developed equitable structures and expectations by: (1) establishing clear expectations for staff, with respect to content and instructional knowledge, and management and data use; and (2) establishing the responsibilities and actions of leaders and staff that was needed to support teachers in meeting these expectations.

HOW DID LEADERSHIP GO ABOUT ACCOMPLISHING ITS AIM?

What steps and actions contributed to effective implementation and buy-in?

Kicking off the Year

Interim Principal Moynihan and her leadership team worked closely and quickly to prepare for the start of the year. With her leadership team, Ellen shared an outline of a “phased implementation” approach that she had drafted and would be modified during the school year, called the Accelerated Math Blueprint. A mathematics-focused vision and mission was drafted in mid-August, in response to the preliminary MCAS data. Prior to school opening, Ellen shared with the entire faculty the vision for improving mathematics, in the presentation “Small Steps, Big Changes: Eight Essential Practices for Transforming schools through Mathematics.” Key principles, including Keep the End in Mind, Understanding the Problem, We are all Researchers, and the 80/20 Rule were introduced. Specifically, the idea that teachers should focus on specific power standards, as identified through the Common Core Mathematics Companion, was emphasized. Included in this presentation are most of the components of the Mathematics Acceleration Blueprint.

Phase 1

At this first faculty meeting (and continuing in early September), leadership emphasized that they would start slowly, and that teachers would have the opportunity to “try out” different strategies. For instance, the first instructional change involved modifying the “notice and note” ELA strategy (which teachers were already familiar with) to be used as a warm-up activity in Math. This strategy was simple enough to be enacted quickly, and the resources were clear enough for teachers to “see” how to enact them. Within a few weeks, most teachers had enacted this strategy, where an image would be displayed at the beginning of class and students would be asked to “notice and note” the math they saw in the images, whether they be pictures of animals, different colored skittles, etc. Teachers were also introduced to the Howard County math resources for new strategies and practices, which were made accessible with videos and clear guidance. And most importantly, teachers experienced success in their classroom.

How do we actualize our mission and vision?

Efforts to build a cultivate a positive math culture also began in September. The phrase “we are all mathematicians” was introduced and consistently stated and restated during morning and afternoon announcements. Educators created and displayed posters throughout the school with images of black mathematicians, orally reinforcing students’ identity as mathematicians through morning announcement

and classroom talk and providing a clear gameplan as to how the school as a collective would act to move math instruction forward. Math norms were co-constructed with students and math expectations (e.g., students doing, mistakes are valuable) were voiced and posted.

Phase 2 and beyond

Belmont Community School has a well-established professional culture characterized by teachers that strive to improve and value teacher collaboration. Teachers plan together, share resources, develop joint lessons in ELA and math, and are open to administrative feedback. Administrator participation in grade-level component meetings is important mechanism that ensures that teachers receive consistent support toward the implementation of instructional practices. And leadership, by all accounts, is well-respected and supports teachers as professionals. They have a well-running “engine for instructional improvement” that no doubt contributed to the successful implementation of the Mathematics Acceleration Blueprint.

Infusing Evidence-Based Strategies. From October 2021 through June 2022—through lots of hard work and planning—leadership introduced a series of evidence-based math strategies and practices during bi-weekly staff meetings. These strategies were designed to supplement lesson planning and allow teachers to have more choice and better options to develop lessons that addressed the focus standards for mastery, and to do so through culturally relevant and effective instruction. As teachers were gradually introduced to evidenced-based instructional practices, they were actively supported in applying these strategies, through the component meetings, direct modeling of instruction by the Interim Principal and coaches, and constructive feedback provided through classroom walkthroughs.

Refining Instructional Practices. Using focus standards for mastery determined the expectations for student work; teachers then had the flexibility to adjust math lessons using strategies introduced during staff meetings. Lessons were structured and focused on deepening use of number routines, identifying and addressing misconceptions, and asking engaging questions. As teachers practiced and became proficient with new instructional strategies (such as number routines), leadership provided an avenue for sharing, through the “Belmont Buzz,” a weekly visual snapshot of teachers’ instruction in action.

Using data to continue to modify and improve instruction. Teachers applied previously used data tools (e.g., quadrant analysis) to identify areas for growth, which could be more readily addressed through flexible lesson planning. With her leadership team, they rolled out a variety of different resources that they felt could make a difference in students’ math achievement, sharing resources and strategies during staff meetings and then supporting and reinforcing the implementation of those strategies through weekly “component” meetings, where the strategies would be further presented, discussed, and debriefed as to their impact.

The following page provides a snapshot of key components of the Mathematics Acceleration Blueprint, as articulated by school leadership.

Math Initiative 2021-22 – Summary of Key Components

First Step: Identifying what needs to be improved.

- We analyzed our assessment data, comparing MCAS with Fall STAR data.
- We used this information to identify the specific focus of our work - content and skills.

Cultivated and Built a Math Culture

- We are Mathematicians: All teachers stated this every day, to our students; we used every opportunity to tell our students that they are all mathematicians.
- We highlighted Jobs in Math (Why Math Matters)
- We highlighted Famous Mathematicians
- Math Norms [Anchor charts; What does a math classroom look like?]

Mission/Vision Visible everywhere

- Morning Announcements
- Posters for hallways and rooms
- Math Expectations
- WPI came in [Robotics]

Quick Win: Started with simple Notice & Notes

Adjusted our Planning [Howard County Resources and Common Core Companion]

- Common Core Mathematics Companion
- Number routines: Hook to all lessons; Number play; Fluency
- Lesson Plan Template [include place holders for number routines, misconceptions, questions]
- End in Mind: When teaching, focus on standards not the curriculum and bring in other resources.
- 80/20 Rule: Focus on power standards
- Misconceptions

Analyzing Data looking close at SGP

- Recognize Low Growth students think of next steps with them

Informative Assessments

- “Proof” Paper vs. whiteboards [This was a switch away from students using white boards to record their work to using actual paper and pencil and renaming it as a “proof paper.”]
- Looking at Student Work Protocols vs. Data right away

Book Study

- Marian Small’s Good Questions: Great Ways to Differentiate Mathematics Instruction in the Standards-Based Classroom
- Moving from remediation to supporting and scaffolding instruction
- Parallel Tasks/Open Ended Questions

All about the Visuals and Tools

- Math toolkits
- Math games/number play manipulatives
- Number Lines at all grade levels

Extended the Learning

- Before the Bell Morning Math Group
-

Chandler Magnet School

Accelerating Student Achievement in Literacy

WHAT DID THE SCHOOL AIM TO ACCOMPLISH?

In the spring of 2020, Principal Noeliz Irizarry was invited to become the principal of Chandler Magnet school, formally beginning in August 2020. Chandler Magnet is one of two Elementary Schools to offer a Dual Language program and is the only school that offers a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program, in addition to the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program offered in all schools. However, the school was identified for improvement by the state in 2017 and students' ELA achievement had not progressed in grades 3-6 as needed to move off the state's accountability list. The urgency to improve provided a challenge and an opportunity to the new administrative team, beginning in Fall 2020.

To identify strengths and areas of need, Principal Irizarry set about to interview all the staff of the school, asking for areas in need of improvement as well as to get to know the staff. An outgrowth of these timely and individualized conversations was a shared understanding of the need to improve literacy instruction; that what they were doing wasn't working and that change was on the horizon. Principal Irizarry and her leadership team closely reviewed multiple years of students' reading scores. They explored and then confirmed a key data trend—that as most of their students moved from grade-to-grade, the gap between the expectations for grade level reading and their skills increasingly widened. And that if they didn't work to reduce this gap, their students would continue to be at a greater and greater disadvantage to access content as they proceeded in their schooling. Principal Irizarry and her team shared this need and vision with teachers, during faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and daily conversations, and teachers recognized that change was needed.

We knew looking at the data that our students were struggling and that they were below grade level. So we knew we had to do something to try to raise these kids up to get them back on grade level. And that's why we started these acceleration groups.

The “problem” was very clear; that the longer students were in school the farther below grade-level they seemed to become, regardless of students' language or the specific program the student was in. At its core, the “problem” was one of ensuring that all students had equitable access to rigorous literacy instruction. However, Chandler Magnet was, like all schools, in the midst of remote learning with the anticipation of potential learning loss for many students across all grades. Within this context, Principal Irizarry and her leadership team decided to pilot the use of an **Acceleration Block** for students in grades 1 and 3 to ensure that students were obtaining key literacy skills (in grade 1) and successfully reading at the end of grade 3. Within the context of remote learning, piloting an Acceleration Block had the advantage of being a tangible action that was feasible (in that it could be piloted during remote learning), and having the potential of immediately improving and addressing students' literacy needs. Working with two grades also served as way to test whether changing the school's approach to acceleration could be scaled up to all grades.

Problem of Practice: How to ensure that all students have equitable access to effective and targeted literacy instruction?

How to design and implement an intervention block that provides student-specific literacy support to all students?

How to improve literacy instruction in all grades and especially grades 4-6?

Aim: For all students, and especially those below grade-level, to make over a full year's growth in literacy.

WHAT WERE THE SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES THAT THE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTED THAT CONTRIBUTED TO ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENT?

Over two years, during SY 2020-21 (remote learning) and SY 2021-22 (primarily in-person learning), Chandler Magnet designed and implemented a flexible and logistically complex Acceleration Block for all students. The school and students experienced significant academic growth in literacy, across all grades. While perhaps not all students made a year's worth of gain, the school moved from the 8th percentile to the 20th percentile within the state's accountability system.

What does Chandler Magnet's Acceleration Block look like and how does it operate?

Each day, all students have a 35-minute Acceleration Block (30 minutes of instruction and 5 minutes for coordinated transitions) in which small groups of students (4 to 6) receive targeted and student-specific instruction.

Schedule: The schedule begins with a well thought out Master Schedule, designed with an aim to include blocks that impact core instruction the least and to schedule each grade's time slot according to students' development (age), if possible. Schedules are communicated so that all teacher teams are fully aware when their acceleration block will be, just as they are for their lunch/recess and Specials. Each grade has its own Acceleration Block time, scheduled at the same time each day (e.g., grade 2 from 10:45 to 11:20; grade 3 from 10:00 to 10:35). During each grade's block of time, all students (including those in TBE, Dual Language, and SEI), have assigned locations and leave their homeroom classroom to go to their assigned space and group (e.g., another classroom, the library, wherever assigned).

Staffing: Nearly all adults participate in the Acceleration Block, whether scheduling, developing coverage, managing materials, or actively teaching and modeling lessons. In order to maintain small groups, the school has an "all hands-on deck" approach to improving student's academic growth. To meet this goal, acceleration teachers include: classroom teachers, special education staff, English as a Second Language (ESL) staff, Instructional Assistants, leadership team members, tutors, and interventionists. For instance, a grade-level may have 3 "homeroom" classrooms with ~60 students; during the Acceleration Block, up to 9 or 10 adults—**Acceleration Educators**—are needed to provide small-group acceleration to 10 groups of ~4 to 6 students (e.g., ~60 students).

Preparation: Administrators and school leaders spend significant time preparing data and resources to reduce the planning and prep required of individual teachers and to ensure that instruction is targeted and consistently provided. All members of the leadership team engage in multiple hours daily and weekly to ensure that the Acceleration Block runs as intended and that Acceleration Educators have the materials, specific intervention strategies, and lessons needed to support students in each and every group.

As a result of leadership's preparation, Acceleration Educators know precisely what to teach and use during Acceleration Blocks and students know exactly where to go and what they are working on.

How do Leaders and Teachers plan for and support the Acceleration Block?

Data Teams and data analysis: At the beginning of the year (September), all students take diagnostic assessments (in this case, the Benchmark Assessment). School leadership analyzes and then visually aggregates and organizes the data to support teachers' subsequent analysis of the data during the Data Team meetings. For instance, BAS is used as a mediator for literacy skills and additional skill-specific and language-specific academic inventories are used to gain an accurate snapshot of students' literacy skill. Administrative preparation allows all educators (e.g., home room, ESL, special education) to quickly see the specific level and skill issues for each student and then have conversations during the Data Team meeting

that focus on each student in their grade – looking at each student’s literacy level, skills, and exploring “why they are here” in terms of literacy needs. This conversation informs how each student is placed in an intentional student group that is focused on specific skills and led by an adult that best meets their individual needs.

Student Groups: Students are initially placed in small groups of 4 to 6 students based on the analysis of data during the initial Data Team meeting. Leaders and educators consider additional factors, such as students’ personalities, patterns of interactions with others and with educators, and Acceleration Educators’ skills, when finalizing student groups. Specifically, educators are paired with groups according to teacher skill set and training. All student groups are small, targeted, and allow for direct literacy instruction on shared needs and skills. Acceleration group educators are then provided detailed information about their group’s overall needs along with specific skills and concepts to target, as provided by leadership team members.

Acceleration Block Lessons: School leaders with expertise in grades K-3 and grades 4-6 closely monitor and support the literacy instruction provided to students during the Acceleration Block. To ensure the equitable provision of effective and targeted literacy instruction and to reduce the time educators might need to plan lessons, expert school leaders provide educators with an abridged lesson structure for LLI instruction typically focused on four high leverage components: word work, phonics, introducing the text, and reading the text. In practice, Acceleration Block educators may physically pick up (or access virtually) the specific lesson that their students are working on and use the lesson structure to immediately provide targeted instruction, working through the lesson components. As a result, all educators using LLI know exactly what their students are working on, the specific instruction (the level, the lesson, and the sequence of lesson components) that can be used with their students, and direct access to the resources and text needed to provide the lesson.

Materials and Logistics: All the intervention supports are directly accessible to all Acceleration Educators in multiple formats. Specifically, all LLI lessons, texts, and materials are color coded and stored in central locations around the school in close proximity to the educators that will be using the materials. As students in each group progress from one level to the next, educators return materials and pick up the next set of materials. Hard copy and digital versions of resources are available, when appropriate, and located in google drives corresponding to levels and lessons (for LLI).

Assessing Progress and Anecdotal Notes: All Acceleration Block educators are asked to use running records or formative assessment to track the progress of the 4 to 6 students in their group. Administration provides models and examples of “notetaking” and “observation” forms that educators may use. Educators record their observational notes on a weekly basis, and all notes are stored electronically (in google drive) and often in hard-copy as well. Observational notes are used during PLC (grade-level meetings) to monitor the impact of the interventions and determine when to move students into new groups. Observational notes also provide student-specific information that educators access when students move to new groups (and new educators), typically every 6 to 8 weeks.

HOW DID LEADERSHIP GO ABOUT ACCOMPLISHING ITS AIM?

What steps and actions contributed to effective implementation and buy-in?

Having identified improving student literacy as its central problem of practice and instructional focus, Principal Irizarry and her leadership team considered options for addressing the multiple issues (e.g., root causes, or drivers) that were influencing the quality and impact of classroom instruction. Core instruction needed to be improved, especially in grades 4 to 6. Influencing the delivery of core instruction was an undercurrent of varied expectations for student learning and a lack of intentional collaboration across teachers and the school's three programs: TBE, Dual Language, and SEI. Faced with the reality of remote instruction (for at least some and perhaps all of the 2020-21 school year), Principal Irizarry and her team decided that the provision of targeted literacy interventions of students in grades 1 and 3 had the greatest potential to mitigate learning loss in students transitioning to 1st and to ensure that 3rd grade students were reading on grade-level. The work in these two grades emerged as a "pilot" of a potential schoolwide approach to acceleration.

2020-21 School Year. Focusing on grades 1 and 3, the leadership team and educators began by using assessments to pinpoint student needs and then organizing (via remote learning) a dedicated 35-minute intervention period for each grade. Digital resources were developed, beginning with a schedule with "links" for students to move to during their assigned time. Multiple staff (including homeroom teachers, coaches, special educators, ESL teachers, and Instructional Assistants) were asked to serve as intervention block educators. School leaders worked to develop and align targeted lessons (using Digital Guided Reading materials, digital Foundations options, and teacher/team created phonics materials) with the needs of students in each group. Supported by school leadership and focused instructional coaches, educators provided targeted literacy support to small groups of 4 to 6 students in grades 1 and 3, using resources and interventions that directly targeted students' needs.

2021-22 School Year. The Acceleration Block approach proved effective and so, with students and staff due to return to school in person the following year, Principal Irizarry and her leadership team prepared for a full school roll-out of Acceleration Blocks, across all grades and students. To allow time for assessments and data meetings, their goal was to have the Acceleration Blocks up and running by mid-October. To organize and prepare for this ambitious endeavor, leadership mapped out a plan and actions for what needed to happen.

What did leadership consider in planning actions?

If acceleration groups were to be kept small (no more than 6), then all adults would need to be involved and many would need to be trained on using the LLI and phonics-based interventions.

For students to be advantageously grouped—based on their skills, their interactions with other students, and with appropriate educators—then data must be collected, analyzed, and collaboratively used to organize the acceleration groups.

Then, leadership had to figure out how to create a master schedule in which acceleration groups were running throughout the day with an educator leading each group. This entailed enculturating the students into the practice of moving through the halls quietly and efficiently at the beginning and end of the acceleration block.

To ensure that educators, which included nearly all adults in the school, were not overwhelmed with planning for core and acceleration, leadership would have to provide each educator with the resources and support to provide the intervention that could best assist their students in each of their groups.

And finally, providing educators with ongoing support and demonstrating that they would "stay the course" with this effort—that the acceleration block was sacred time and would not be postponed for any reason.

What actions did leadership take and how did they contribute to effective implementation?

Sharing the vision and commitment

In spring of 2021 and again in August 2021, Principal Irizarry and her leadership team shared with their faculty the urgency to continue to improve students' literacy and a commitment to use the acceleration block schoolwide, beginning in October. The goal that "all students would make at least one year of growth" was communicated to staff, with the commitment from administration that teachers and staff would be supported throughout the effort. An initial timeline was shared, illustrating the planning that was to take place to prepare for an October roll-out.

Organizational Preparation (May - Oct)

Scheduling, Staffing, and Resources: Leadership reorganized the master schedule, planned for the allocation of staff among acceleration groups, and organized and provided access to all intervention resources, materials, lessons, and notetaking templates. For instance, acceleration and LLI resources were placed in three locations across the school, to minimize overlap among teachers using resources and the time needed to secure lessons and materials.

Building Teacher Capacity through Training (June - Aug): Between June and August (2021) A variety of training opportunities were provided to bolster the capacity of staff:

- Formal Guided Reading training was provided for all teachers grade 3 through 6.
- Foundations Training through Wilson Academy was provided to special educators and select primary teacher leaders.
- Formal, three-day LLI training was provided for all ESL teachers, special education staff, Instructional Assistants, and some teacher leaders.
- District-based Just Words training was provided for special education staff and some intermediate teacher leaders.
- School-Based BAS training for homeroom teachers and select support staff members was provided in Spring of 2021.

Data and data use (June and Sept): Leadership ensured full administration of Benchmark Assessment at the beginning of the year, as the primary means of identifying students' levels and areas of need and placement in acceleration groups. Teachers that needed training on administrating the BAS received support in May/June of 2020-21 school year.

Implementation and Monitoring (Oct-June)

Coordinated Systems to Manage and Analyze Data (Sept-Oct): Members of the leadership team set up school-wide organizational systems for data collection and analysis. As part of this work, leadership carefully and thoroughly analyzed BAS data as well as other skill- and language-specific inventories. This information was used to identify preliminary areas of student needs and groupings and for ongoing monitoring of student progress. Importantly, having a school-wide system for data collection and analysis allowed leaders to organize BAS (and other) data in preparation for the data meetings so that teachers could quickly engage in student-specific conversations and to demonstrate that all students were the responsibility of the entire grade-level team.

Data Team Meeting (Oct): Leadership convened data team meetings in each grade, which involved focused, student-specific conversations among all teachers and resulted in strategic student groups within and across grades. Members of leadership facilitate these meetings to elicit maximum data, from both on and off "the page", in order to ensure the best possible starting group for each student's individual needs and group needs. To ensure that teachers could meet, leadership developed a coverage plan to schedule grade level

MTSS meetings that include all homeroom teachers (of the grade) along with the support staff who will be working with that grade level.

Building Teacher Capacity through Job-Embedded Support (Sept-Oct): As the Acceleration Block kicked off, leadership also worked with classroom teachers so that core instruction would align with and reinforce students' participation in Acceleration. For instance, members of the leadership team worked with intermediate classroom teachers to implement fluid small group responsive literacy instruction into the literacy block. And classroom teachers, Instructional Assistants, ESL teachers, coaches, tutors, and special educators worked to build capacity in monitoring reading behaviors and performed calibration sessions for consistency and validity during data talks.

Late October - Opening the train station for business: Comparing the Acceleration Block to a "train station" with multiple moving parts, responsibilities, literal "stations" and timetables, leadership described how they kicked things off on their first day of operation. To support transitions and preparation, all educators (at each grade level block), were provided an Acceleration Assignment documents which included each educator's name, room number/location, starting lesson & location of materials (if applicable), group of student names and their homeroom. And on the first day of Acceleration, every student had a sticker or piece of paper – a "train ticket" – that showed their starting point and their destination. And off they went, with teachers in the halls directing traffic and making sure everyone got to their destination.

Ongoing Commitment and Support

Creating a schedule and then working with student and educator schedules to provide a 30-minute intervention block to every student in the building required a great deal of planning and orchestration, something the leadership team acknowledged was a great deal of work. In addition, identifying and then providing the resources to undertake the interventions on a daily and weekly basis also required a great deal of work. However, this level of effort among leadership was seen by staff and teachers as crucial and a key factor in cultivating the buy-in, support, and shared commitment needed to make it through challenging times. Teachers were asked to make changes but were actively supported to do so AND teachers could see how hard administrators were (and are) working to do what is right for kids. All those involved—leaders, teachers, and all educators in the school—acknowledged how much effort it took to orchestrate the endeavor, and in seeing the payoff, all bought into the school-wide effort.

University Park Campus School

Accelerating and Sustaining Excellence for the Entire School Community

WHAT DID THE SCHOOL AIM TO ACCOMPLISH?

University Park Campus School’s (UPCS) story demonstrates how a secondary school can sustain academic excellence for traditionally disadvantaged students. There is a pervasive myth in American society that inner city schools, or schools that serve majority low-income or minority students, are not as “good” as suburban schools. That apart from students attending magnet or selective schools, students in city schools are less likely to succeed academically and throughout life. UPCS thoroughly debunks this myth.

UPCS was [Founded in 1997](#) by Donna Rodrigues and two veteran teachers, Dermot Shea and June Eressy, in partnership with Worcester Public Schools. Their original aim was to create a public, non-selective school that served the local community AND that would be a “great” school—meaning that students’ academic achievement would be on par with or outperform statewide averages and that all students would have the skills to succeed in college. Stated simply, the goal was to “get traditionally underserved and ‘low achieving’ students to achieve at a high level.” UPCS then expanded from a 7-8 grade school to a 7-12 school in. Today, UPCS serves ~225 students, with 35-40 students per grade. The student population of UPCS is comparable to a “house” or “cluster” in Worcester’s middle and high schools. UPCS students have consistently exceeded the academic performance of students in similar schools across the state and performed on par with statewide averages for all schools.

Founded by and closely connected to Clark University, the school’s instructional philosophy and practices are drawn from research and evidence-based practices. UPCS’s founders intentionally applied research-based practices as they worked to accomplish their aim of providing all students with high quality instruction. A majority of teachers (in 1997 and continuing through 2022) are Clark University graduates, sharing a common approach to instruction and a belief that all students can and should succeed. Paramount is the fact that instruction is based on research, learned by teachers through practicums and sharing of expertise, and continually improved upon within their context and with direct input from their students and colleagues.

Immediate Aim and Problem of Practice

For the purpose of this case narrative, we distinguish between the founding aim and goals of the school—to design and found a “great” school that provides high quality instruction to students from the local community—and an immediate aim that the school works on annually, with great effort and attention. UPCS has clearly met its initial aim, as the school is well-established and has maintained high standards for teacher professionalism and student achievement. However, students that enter in 7th and 8th grade each year are new to the school, with some who may face challenges with their home or social life, and most (if not all) are unfamiliar with the expectations and ways of working and thinking that characterize UPCS. Many of these students enter 7th grade needing to improve academically and may be considered “below grade level.”

With this as context, the annual problems of practices that UPCS works on is: (1) how to teach, inculcate, and impress upon students what it means to thrive in an academically and socially safe environment (2) how to accelerate their learning, so that they can succeed academically through middle and high school.

Problem of Practice: How to accelerate students’ learning and provide a first-class education to a traditionally disadvantaged population?

WHAT WERE THE SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES THAT THE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTED THAT CONTRIBUTED TO ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENT?

The following describes the model components and signature features of a 7-12 school capable of accelerating and sustaining high academic achievement for all students, as employed in practice by University Park Campus School (UPCS).

A Foundational and Lived Belief That All Students Can Succeed.

First, the school has a written and explicit **Mission, Vision**, and set of **Core Values and Expectations** that are actively expressed by leaders and teachers, and that drive all actions, practices, and ways of working among leaders, teachers, and students. Second, the entire school community believes and embodies a culture of **continuous reflection** (stemming from its core values and expectations) and **mutual, or internal accountability** among adults and students.

Mission – Vision – Core Values and Expectations

The school’s vision and mission provide a compelling rationale for accomplishing their aim—to accelerate students’ learning and provide a first-class education to a traditionally disadvantaged population. Shared below are excerpts from the school Mission and Vision, followed by the full version of UPCS’s **Core Values and Expectations**. Please refer to and read the UPCS’s full **Mission, Vision, Values and Expectations** document.

Mission: University Park Campus School exists to provide a first-class education to a traditionally disadvantaged population. Situated in the economically challenged Main South section of Worcester, UPCS is a public, 7-12 school that accepts neighborhood students of all abilities and prepares them for success in college.

Vision: The vision of University Park Campus School is for each student to graduate prepared for success in college and careers. As an institution, the goal of UPCS is to continually reflect upon both our successes and our shortcomings, and to use this reflection to revise instructional practices to best serve our students.

Core Values and Expectations

The goal at UPCS is to educate resourceful, reflective, and responsible scholars who approach new learning situations with a unique sense of eagerness and confidence. While engaging in college preparatory content, UPCS students are expected to evaluate, analyze, infer from, retain and apply information. This becomes possible, we believe, when students are trained as thinkers—when they are encouraged to practice, to notice, to inquire, and to experiment. Under these circumstances, instruction must be personalized, and content must be taught alongside study skills relevant to the 21st century; both latter and former will be tied to real world application. It is also necessary, if students are going to go on to pursue post-secondary course work and eventually become leaders within their chosen fields, that learning be framed as an ongoing process—complete with pitfalls. Failure cannot be seen as reason to give up, but rather the opposite, a catalyst to do better next time. Our students shall discover that persistence coupled with real, focused effort, will bear fruit and be effective. All are deserving of success, but none can achieve it without hard work. Our teachers will embolden students to pursue their passions, encourage them to value the journeys they take to reach their goals, and allow them to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning.

Notice that the core values and expectations refer to the school’s vision and provides specifics on how to accomplish this goal. The core values and expectations describe students “trained as thinkers” and articulates what this means in practice. The values and expectations also describe what instruction involves; that it is personalized, linked to specific content standards, and “tied to real world application.” Expectations prioritize student persistence and hard work, coupled with students taking ownership for their own learning. Each statement directly informs all organizational, professional, and instructional decision making, forcing the question: *If these are our goals, our values, and our expectations, then how do we make it happen?*

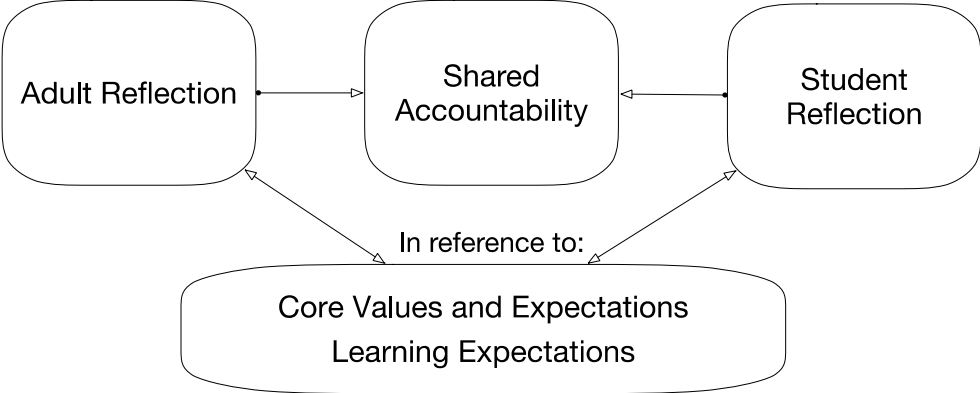
A Culture of Reflection and Accountability

The school values *reflection* among all leaders, teachers, and students, and endeavors to teach students how to be reflective. Deeply coupled with the school’s focus on reflection—among leaders, teachers, and students striving to improve—is a *culture of mutual accountability* to be reflective, to continuously improve, and to encourage critical thinking and learning. Notably, both adults AND students are equally encouraged to reflect and to hold each other accountable.

Opportunities for adult and student reflection are intentionally incorporated into all aspects of learning, such as:

- (1) constructing expectations for group work by asking students how groups are useful and exploring ways to improve collaborative group work;
- (2) engaging in instructional improvement, through active use of instructional rounds and teachers regularly asking students for feedback on instruction and assessments; and
- (3) during professional learning community teams and faculty meetings, through which teachers reflect upon how their instruction is supporting the school’s mission and instructional expectation.

Active reflection contributes to improvement and reinforces shared accountability, which in turn fosters and reinforces reflection.



For students, accountability includes *personal* accountability (for their own learning), *shared* accountability (for peers, during group work), and *organizational* accountability, as a check on the school’s and teachers’ effectiveness. Finally, teachers speak to and define accountability not as compliance monitoring; rather, adults and the school are personally and collectively accountable for the attainment of its mission and vision.

Instructional Components and Features that Reinforce the school’s Mission and Vision

The school is characterized by key components and features that have been refined over time and reflect the school’s answer to the question: *How can we, and how do we, operationalize our mission and vision?*

All Honors Classes through Heterogenous Grouping

All classrooms, especially in grades 7 to 10, are designed as honors-level classrooms. The school does not group students by academic level nor offer courses at different levels (e.g., tracked courses, such as having a “college prep” and “honors level” for the same course).¹ Neither students nor parents ask for,

or expect there to be, tracked courses; the idea of different level courses is foreign to students. Accelerating learning among all students, as articulated in the school’s mission, requires that all classes be offered as honors courses; as such, the goal is not to “do heterogenous grouping” but rather, to ensure that all students receive the instruction and support needed to achieve at high levels. Offering and placing students into non-honors courses would result in some students not receiving grade-level standards-based instruction.

Accelerated learning is expected of all students and is a central goal of teachers’ planning and instruction. Teachers intentionally design lessons and instruction to provide learning opportunities, including skill development, to all students. In 7th and 8th grade, all students receive a double-dose of mathematics, through their core mathematics class and a numeracy class. The mathematics teacher and numeracy teacher work together to align instruction and skill development, and all classes are heterogeneously grouped. Beginning in 11th grade, all students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses. For instance, an 11th grade student would take either AP Literature or Honors English.

Common Instructional Framework and Collective Learning Expectations

The school uses three foundational guidance documents to support teachers and students realize the vision and mission of the school: (1) a *common instructional framework*; (2) *academic expectations*; and (3) *social, behavioral, and civic expectations*.

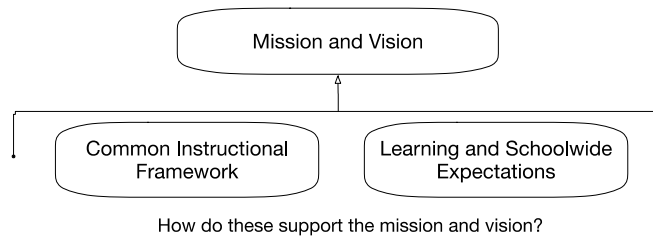
Leaders and teachers describe how they consistently use the ideas, expectations, and rubrics in these documents to guide their daily practice and professional interactions, resulting in a high degree of instructional and organizational coherence across all classrooms. Active reflection is used to continually refine and adapt instructional practices. And leaders, teachers, and students hold each other mutually accountable for these practices and expectations as the means of achieving their mission and vision. Each document has been refined over time, as part of the school’s focus on continuous improvement to meet the needs of its diverse students and the broader community. School leaders describe the relationship between these documents as reflective questions, as depicted here:

Key Components

- All Honors Classes – Heterogenous Classrooms
- Common Instructional Framework
- Learning Expectations
 - Academic Expectations
 - Social, Civic, and Behavioral Expectations

Highlighted Instructional Features

- Collaborative Group Work
- Scaffolding Instruction



¹ For external readers: Worcester public schools has traditionally allowed for courses to be offered at two levels: college prep and honors. With minimal exceptions, most college prep course level are less academically rigorous than the honors courses.

The **Common Instructional Framework** consists of six interrelated instructional strategies. As described by the school, “these strategies create classrooms that allow for powerful learning and powerful teaching and form the basis of a coherent college preparatory curriculum.” Daily and weekly classroom activities include most to all of these strategies. For instance, collaborative group work (in any subject) typically includes purposeful questioning and activities that scaffold content and tasks, often building upon writing tasks and classroom talks. Leaders and teachers describe these strategies as “the practices that make students critical thinkers” and the means of providing rigorous and differentiating grade-level and standards-based content.

- Common Instructional Framework**
- Collaborative Group Work
 - Writing to Learn
 - Questioning
 - Scaffolding
 - Classroom Talks
 - Literacy Groups

The **Academic Expectations** are comprised of a set of domains and rubrics that teachers regularly use to design, refine, and reflect upon their instruction. Academic expectations provide goals and benchmarks for teachers regarding the focus of their instruction and expected student outcomes. Academic expectations provide goals for students, as descriptions of what they are expected to accomplish. Students are introduced to these domains and rubrics at various points in the curriculum. Rubrics include a set of domains, attributes, and performance levels (exceeding, meeting, developing, not evident). The academic expectations are explicitly linked to and reinforce the mission, vision, and desired school culture.

Table 1. UPCS Academic Expectations

Reading	Communicate Ideas	Think Critically	Collaboration	Reflection
Read and deeply understand a variety of genres across all subject areas.	Write and speak to communicate ideas and demonstrate learning.	Persevere through complex tasks, synthesize information, and demonstrate understanding.	Facilitate and take ownership of learning.	Reflect on academic growth.

The **Social, Civic and Behavioral Expectations** are comprised of a set of domains and rubrics that describe social and civic expectations and non-negotiable schoolwide and classroom behavioral expectations among students. The social and civic expectations include specific attributes and performance levels, that like those described in the academic expectations, provide benchmarks for students to consider and reflect upon. Behavioral expectations are reinforced at the beginning of each year and consistently used by all teachers and administrators.

Table 2. UPCS Social, Civic, and Behavioral Expectations

Social Expectation	Civic Expectation	Behavioral Expectations – “O-SNAP”
Develop and maintain the collaborative UPCS culture.	Contribute to the greater global community.	Respect the physical space of OTHERS . Use only SAFE and NON-THREATENING language. ATTENTION: Stay focused on the task at hand. Come to class PREPARED and on time.

Spotlight Instructional Features

Collaborative Group Work. Collaborative group work is used extensively in all classrooms, as a central instructional practice that is deemed essential to providing high-quality instruction in honors-level and heterogeneous classrooms. It is important to note that teachers do not use one “type” of group work nor are specific expectations for group work required across teachers or content areas. Rather, collaborative group work is a malleable instructional strategy that teachers proactively and consistently use to meet multiple goals:

- To create student ownership of their work; to socialize students as academic being and become critical thinkers;
- To support students as they learn how to interact with each other;
- To effectively differentiate instruction for all students;
- To provide opportunities for reflection and revision; and
- To give students voice.

The form, purpose, and goals of Collaborative Group Work may vary; however, all teachers use group work as a mainstay of their instruction. Group Work is planned for and adjusted daily.

How do students become accustomed to engaging in effective group work? A distinguishing feature of UPCS is that its leaders and teachers spend considerable up-front time **training and teaching students not only how to engage in group work, but to understand WHY engaging in group work is effective and conducive to learning.** This training and learning occurs in nearly every class, by each teacher, and for all students. At the beginning of the year, students are asked to identify effective and ineffective group work and teaming, and then provide their own voice in helping teachers design and improve how group work might be used in class. This combination of training, learning, and provision of student voice is a significant factor contributing to the success of group work at UPCS.

Scaffolding. Scaffolding collaborative group work is a key mechanism for scaffolding instruction, as described by leaders and teachers. While the school does not have a formal lesson planning template, all teachers refer to the schools’ learning expectations (academic, social, and civic) and state content standards in developing lessons. Then, each unit and series of lessons includes intentional scaffolding during whole group direct instruction, writing, classroom talk, and group work.

Collaborative Group Work: Collaborative group work involves bringing students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Collaborative group work uses questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk and centers literacy groups [UPCS Common Instructional Framework. 2022]

Scaffolding: Scaffolding helps students to connect prior knowledge and experience with new information. Teachers use this strategy to connect students with previous learning in a content area as well as with previous learning in an earlier grade. Scaffolding also helps facilitate thinking about a text by asking students to draw on their subjective experience and prior learning to make connections to new materials and ideas. [UPCS Common Instructional Framework, 2022]

Nearly every aspect of a lesson includes supports for students at different levels (e.g., vocabulary, questions, use of high-yield instructional strategies, and formative assessments so that teachers and students know whether they are attaining the desired academic and critical thinking skills. Developing and delivering a lesson is, by definition, scaffolding the lesson to meet students where they are with an eye towards grade-level or higher outcomes. Teachers describe scaffolding as “how we get the students to do the work” and scaffolding group work “in the moment” multiple times during a class period.

HOW DOES LEADERSHIP GO ABOUT ACCOMPLISHING ITS AIM?

What steps and actions contributed to effective implementation and buy-in?

Each year, approximately 40 new incoming 7th grade students enter UPCS, in addition to 8th and 9th grade cohorts of students that have only been at the school for 1 or 2 years, respectively. For these students to succeed academically, it is imperative to acculturate these students to the values and expectations of UPCS. To do this, UPCS actively accelerates students' learning competencies when they enter school in 7th grade through specific activities and then deliberately scaffolds and supports their learning through classroom-based strategies and activities. The goal is to ensure that all students have the skills and capacity to be academically successful.

How does UPCS endeavor build students' capacity and skill as learners?

Many of the instructional strategies employed at UPCS are new to incoming students or are used more extensively than students' may have experienced in elementary school. UPCS approaches this challenge by "getting to know" all students and providing students with voice as they are exposed to and "trained" in UPCS values and learning expectations. Intensive upfront engagement during the first two to four weeks of school provides the foundation for ongoing reinforcement of the UPCS way of doing things.

Two Week Academy for 7th and 8th graders

During the first two weeks of school, school leaders and teachers use multiple strategies to engage students and share the academic expectations for learning and behavioral expectations. The focus is on getting students to see themselves as academic beings and to introduce specific instructional strategies and ways of working that students will experience across all classrooms and content areas.

- All students are invited to complete a *Getting to Know You* form that includes questions such as: How do you learn best? Who do you learn best from? Teachers use this information as they begin to form collaborative groups and consider learning activities.
- Leadership and teachers share the values and learning expectations, focusing on core principles and expectations, such as: critical thinking, perseverance, collaboration, and reflection. Students are invited to engage with these concepts in reference to their own context and learning.
- Teachers introduce the use of Collaborative Group Work as a key instructional strategy that will be used across classrooms. Rather than tell students what group work means, teachers engage students in multiple activities designed so that students understand and make sense of what group work entails, and how it supports their thinking. Students become cognitively aware that one can engage in group work, or full group discussion to solve a problem AND to get better at that type of interaction. Sample activities described by teachers include:
 - Asking students (in groups) to describe what effective group work looks like and articulate "what it feels like to be in an effective group."
 - Having students (during the first or second day of class) engage in group work around a personally relevant and fun question (e.g., What's the best type of shoe?) and using this activity to have students reflect upon what it feels like to engage in effective group work.
 - Telling students that "today we are going to practice group work" or "practice full group discussion" so that students approach the activity reflectively and with the knowledge that their voice is valued.

- Including reflective questions in daily instruction, prompting students to consider “how did groups work today” and “what might we change.”

Teacher Autonomy with an eye towards Improvement

The schools’ Core Values and Expectations, Learning and Behavioral Expectations, and Common Instructional Framework provide the foundation for classroom learning activities. Teachers are encouraged to use their expertise to apply these concepts and practices in their classrooms given the diversity of students’ needs and assets. Coming out of the 2021-22 school year, leadership designed its first faculty meeting to revisit their learning expectations and asked teachers to “take the instructional expectations, play with them and use them in your classroom.” Teachers were then invited to share, during the second faculty meeting, what this looked like in their classroom. The goal of this activity was twofold: (1) to reaffirm teachers’ use and commitment to the instructional expectations (coming out of Covid) and (2) so that teachers could experiment, test and then share what was working, to the betterment of the entire school community.

Academic Acceleration in Math

UPCS provides all 7th and 8th grade students with a double-dose of mathematics, comprised of a core mathematics class and a numeracy class, also heterogeneously grouped. Students that need support with literacy and writing receive support in core classrooms (English, History, Science). In Mathematics, the core teacher and the Numeracy teacher meet weekly, if not daily, to coordinate the lessons and skills covered in Numeracy, so that there is a tight alignment between the core curriculum, students’ areas for growth (and advancement), and the Numeracy lessons.

How does UPCS endeavor build teachers’ capacity and skill as learners?

Collaborative Problem Solving through Teaming

The school has a standing Wednesday morning meeting for the entire school community and weekly content-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that are teacher-driven and focused on improving instruction so that students attain the school’s learning expectations. Each meeting type—Wednesday morning meetings and PLCs—are opportunities for collaborative problem solving and reflection, driven by the school’s mission and vision.

Speaking of their students and in respect to their mission:

We love and respect them, and where they currently are; and we view it as our duty in the messaging from the top on down—to do everything in our power—and here are the ways we can do that (e.g., Instructional Framework). To take any kid...and get them to the next step, and then get them to the step after that. That constant messaging—every decision made here is made with the student experience at the center. The carved-out time to meet, whether it's PLCs or our 25 years standing Wednesday morning meeting, is to talk to each other, make sure we're still on the same board and when there's an issue, (identify) who can help with it. And (then) adjust as needed for the group in front of us at the moment, meaning the kids. So that's from the top level—to continually message this, and to continue to protect the time to talk about it.

Teachers have autonomy to determine how what to discuss during PLCs, in reference to the school’s mission and vision and how to continually improve their instruction to meet students’ needs. While the content of PLCs may vary, all PLCs (a) actively look at and review student work and (b) use Instructional Rounds as a primary mechanism for reflection, sharing, and improvement. All PLCs identified the critical importance of seeing and learning from each other, during their meetings and through Rounds.

Instructional Rounds

Each content PLC organizes Instructional Rounds about once a quarter (1-2 months). Instructional Rounds may be prompted by the PLC collaboratively identifying a shared instructional focus (e.g., writing, science reports, classroom talk) or by a teacher who may have a problem of practice or an instructional strategy that they want to share and receive feedback on. Rounds typically have a specific focus and involve the observing teachers gathering data on instructional strategies and what student learning (e.g., engagement, activities, student work) looks like.

- To prepare for the Round, the hosting teacher describes their focus, the intent of the lesson, and what to “look for” with respect to student learning.
- During the Round, the host teacher invites their colleagues to observe one or more lessons, opening themselves up for feedback and reflection.
- Then, the visiting teachers “post” their observations, data, and reflections about what they observed students doing and learning.

Outcomes of the Round often include refined instructional practice and sharing of practices across teachers. As such, Instructional Rounds provide a formal mechanism for collaborative problem-solving, reflection, and refinement of classroom instruction.

Summary

The acceleration strategies described here are illustrative of how UPCS takes specific actions, each year and sustained over time, to accelerate academic success for all students. Guided by a laser-like mission and set of learning expectations for all students, these actions (and many others, undoubtedly) provide the foundation for accelerated learning while reinforcing and sustaining the school’s core values and expectations.

LEADERSHIP ACTIONS FOR ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENT

Key Leadership Actions to initiate an improvement effort.

1. The principal, in concert with core leadership team members, identifies an instructional need, creates a sense of urgency with staff to address the need, and articulates what they endeavor to improve.
2. Then, the principal engages the leadership team in the design of a strategic effort to improve instruction and dramatically improve student achievement, by both guiding and assisting staff in the deployment of specific evidence-based instructional strategies.

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

Leadership Moves	Rationale – Why is this important?
<p>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.</p>	<p>Clarifying an instructional focus and identifying specific evidence-based practices provide teachers with tangible practices that can be incorporated into lessons and instruction.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>A vision, focused on improvement and that is goal-oriented, justifies and helps teachers to understand and make sense of the changes they are being asked to make regarding instructional practice.</p>
<p>3. Make Visible Quick Wins: Leadership makes visible early wins and impact, which leads to teacher buy-in and motivation.</p>	<p>Recognizing, sharing, and celebrating success [quick wins] boost teachers’ and students’ motivation.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Asking teachers to change their practice without providing expert training, model exemplars, support, and resources is a common mistake that leads to frustration.</p>
<p>5. Provide Ongoing Guidance and Support: Leadership creates and uses a continuous and deliberate process for ongoing guidance, support, and assistance to teachers.</p>	<p>Ongoing monitoring and support mitigate the potential for teachers and students to experience struggles or challenges that undermine improvement.</p>
<p>6. Grant Defined Autonomy: Leadership encourages teacher autonomy within specific expectations for lesson planning, instruction, and outcomes.</p>	<p>Teacher autonomy allows teachers to make professional decisions as to how to address each of their student’s needs within the instructional focus and practice of the school and contributes to shared accountability.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Prioritizing the use of data AND providing teachers with tools (e.g., data dashboards, quadrant analyses) increases the likelihood that data will be used to set goals, assess progress, and lead to instructional modifications.</p>

Exploration of Leadership Moves and Actions in Practice

The Case Narratives reveal several common themes across each school's effort to accelerate improvement efforts and dramatically improve student achievement—for elementary school students in Math and Literacy, and among secondary school students across content areas.

We frame these leadership moves and actions through the lens of the four Core Practices of **Leadership, Intentional Instruction, Student Specific Supports**, and a **Positive Climate and Culture**.

Core Practice. Leadership and Professional Learning

The school has established a community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration.

School leadership is critical in getting everyone on board around the need, galvanizing the focus and effort, coalescing a leadership team to drive the work, and providing the mission, vision, resources and support to do the work.

In the Elementary School cases, Noeliz and Ellen came to their school context investigating and then identifying the need to address a significant need of each school in terms of student achievement—Noeliz in Chandler Magnet's students reading and Ellen in Belmont Community Schools' student proficiency in math. At UPCS, the initial aim of the school was to ensure that traditionally underserved students all receive high quality instruction and opportunities to succeed academically. And UPCS is annually challenged to engage incoming 7th graders new to the culture and expectations of their school. In each case, data and a moral imperative to improve signals the need to either do something different, or to continue to accelerate improvement among incoming students.

Ellen from the get-go rallied the school to pursue students' vision of themselves as mathematicians – as “doers of math” and having the confidence to succeed in mathematics. Specific motivational tactics were employed, such as posting the school's vision throughout, speaking the mantra “we are all mathematicians,” and identifying and showcasing diverse historical mathematicians throughout the school. And they quickly found success using the “notice and note” practice and number routines, using pictures and images to show their students that math was everywhere in the world, and to reinforce how math could be recognized and used in the world.

Noeliz started her work at Chandler Magnet by interviewing every staff member in the building asking where they saw the need, and to identify staff's commitment to doing right by their students. With her leadership team, she proposed that small group instruction targeting specific student needs could accelerate their growth in reading. And she made it clear that students continuing to fall behind in reading would be falling behind in their futures.

At UPCS, the school's mission, vision, and core values and expectations provide the foundation for continuing engage their students with excitement and urgency. The school's founding aim and purpose was the driving force in the school's early years. While the school is now well-established, maintaining and sustaining their vision, core values and expectations requires constant attention as communicated by leadership and reinforced through written expectations and organizational processes that teachers and students use on a daily basis.

The slow roll out supported by a leadership team.

Each principal galvanized and motivated the work of their leadership teams in the roll out and ongoing support of their teachers, whether for a new initiative (in the case of Belmont and Chandler Magnet) or for sustaining high instructional expectations, in the case of UPCS. In each case, leadership teams provided or continually reinforce specific and evidence-based resources and guidance so that teachers have the resources needed improve, modify, or sustain instructional practices.

At Belmont, Ellen worked with her leadership team to set non-negotiable expectations that teachers focus instruction on “focus standards for mastery.” Then leadership progressively provided training resources to teacher teams during staff meetings and follow-up component meetings (e.g., grade-level team meetings), creating a space for them to first discuss and then try out the resources and identified instructional strategies over time, identifying those practices that were observed to have an impact on their students’ learning. The practices were both accessible and doable, supported by video, discussions, and classroom-embedded guidance. Teachers commented on the value of the flexibility to try the practices in their classrooms within the focus on core practices that Ellen and the leadership team felt could make a significant difference, such as the regular use of “notice and note” activities, number and closure routines, and proof papers.

At Chandler Magnet, the team decided to pilot the small group intervention program with the 1st and 3rd grade teams while they were still doing virtual instruction during COVID. Then when they saw success, they organized a school-wide schedule putting “all hands-on deck” with identified small groups of students identified with specific instructional needs and provided teachers with specific resources and guidance to assist teachers’ work with the groups. Notable at Chandler Magnet was the extensive organizational preparation undertaken by school leadership, such as preparing data and data dashboards to be used in data meetings, organizing student groups, and carefully organizing intervention lessons, tools, and resources so that educators knew exactly what to use in each small group, on a daily basis.

At UPCS, the Common Instructional Framework and heterogeneously grouped classrooms are foundational, and essentially “non-negotiables” components of their educational program. As new teachers come to the school and as the school population shifts, teachers are supported to revisit, refine, and adapt their instructional practices. Faculty meetings, standing Wednesday meetings, and PLCs are used by teachers (and supported by leaders) so that teachers reflect upon how their instructional practices are being used to meet the school’s goals, and specifically, to assess whether their instructional practices are leading to the attainment of learning expectations for students.

Intentional use of Teaming Practices and Professional Learning.

Each school deliberately used teaming practices and faculty meetings to support teachers in improving their instruction and in using data to identify student-specific needs. Chandler Magnet focused their data team meetings on careful analysis of student’s literacy needs to inform placement in Acceleration Groups. Belmont Community used existing component meetings to focus extensively on applying the mathematics professional development they received, into lessons and instruction. Component meetings were supported and monitored by the full administrative team (present at all meetings); additionally, grade-level teams continued their daily collaboration to develop shared mathematics and literacy lessons. At UPCS, collaborative problem solving—in Wednesday meetings, content-based PLCs, and faculty meetings—continues as standing operating procedure for how to improve. These meetings are particularly important for 7th and 8th grade teachers, to quickly assess the needs of students and plan accordingly, and in a unified fashion across classrooms.

Core Practices: Intentional Instruction and Student Specific Support

The school provides student-specific supports and interventions informed by data and the identification of student-specific needs.

The school employs intentional practices for improving teacher-specific and student-responsive instruction.

Infusing expertise and research-based instructional practices.

Each school—their leaders and educators—drew upon research-based practices to pursue their focused efforts.

Noeliz and her team drew upon targeted LLI Fountas and Pinnell lesson components to guide teachers in their daily work with students, including daily notetaking and weekly benchmark assessments to track student progress. In cases where students were particularly proficient, students were engaged in enrichment activities. And where needed, lessons were modeled for teachers.

Ellen, similarly, drew upon resources to assist and support her teams to pursue research-based practices, such as provided by way of the Howard County Mathematics Resource site² and several books that included lessons on differentiation and teaching to the Power Standards. The school focused on particular instructional strategies through their staff meetings and followed up on their implementation and efficacy in weekly component meetings supported by observations and feedback.

UPCS leaders and teachers have a shared instructional foundation drawn from their educational background and training from Clark University. The school's Common Instructional Framework spells out the specific instructional practices that all teachers use on a consistent basis, in crafting lessons and providing instruction. Leaders and teacher use their standing Wednesday meetings and content-based PLCs to develop vertically aligned curriculum and instruction, using the practices in the Instructional Framework to continually adapt and improve instruction.

Using data to evidence impact and inform instruction.

Central to all of this work is the use of data to first, give the need to do something specific clarity, and second, to demonstrate the efficacy of the effort.

At Chandler Magnet and Belmont Community, the incoming principals undertook a significant analysis of the student achievement data available to them several years prior to their installment and at the time that they came on board. Then they shared that data with their staff, instilling the imperative to do something different for their students.

UPCS leaders and content-based PLCs review data regularly, with particular emphasis on the progress of 7th and 8th grade students. Data is central to the efforts of each school, in galvanizing the collective commitment to undertake or develop new initiatives and also in evidencing the impact and refining the activities themselves.

² To learn more about the Howard County Mathematics program, go here: <https://www.hcpss.org/academics/mathematics>

Core Practice: Positive Culture and Climate

The school has established a climate and culture that provides a safe, orderly and respectful environment for students and a collegial, collaborative, and professional culture among teachers that supports the school's focus on increasing student achievement.

Acculturating Students as Academic Beings, as a primary mechanism to drive student agency and accountability.

A somewhat unexpected, yet critically important, theme observed across all three schools was the intentionality that each school expressed towards cultivating student agency, choice, and voice. A defining feature of Belmont Community's improvement effort involved casting students as "mathematicians," repeatedly telling students that they were mathematicians and that "math is everywhere." Belmont Community's practice of asking teachers and students to develop norms for math classrooms, and to define what math classroom looks and feels like, is remarkably similar to UPCS's work with 7th and 8th grade students, in which they teach students how to engage in collaborative group work, in part by asking students to define and reflect upon group work. In each case, students and adults co-construct shared cultural norms regarding learning and classroom interactions. Similarly, Chandler Magnet dramatically shifted the expectations of teachers (e.g., that all students were to make one year of academic gain) and altered the structure of the school day so that students received direct instruction that they reported as useful and meaningful. In describing the Acceleration Block, multiple students described learning specific skills (e.g., writing in complete sentences, proper grammar, reading) that was helping them in their ELA and math classes.

A Whole School effort driven by the use of resources, data, and structures and practices that foregrounded educator support and collaborative inquiry.

In each case, "the end" was in mind – increasing students' reading ability, math skills, or ensuring that students graduate high school with skills to succeed in college or work. To pursue these ends each school identified resources that could guide teachers in their classroom and small group instruction. What was expected was clear, and resources were made available to support teachers in enacting those practices.

At Chandler Magnet, the leadership team created a school-wide schedule that afforded each student a ½ hour of targeted small group reading instruction specific to the needs of each student, and the educator was provided with explicit guidance on what to do each week in their small groups, along with the resources to enact those practices.

At Belmont, Ellen rallied the entire staff to focus on the development of students' identity as mathematicians and research-based practices that could explicitly impact their skills at doing math, including regular "notice and note" activities, number routines, and the use of proof papers. Instructional strategies and practices were presented at staff meetings and teams considered their application and efficacy through their regular component meetings. Where needed, educators were provided additional support through observations, modeling, and coaching. And data was regularly used to track impact and inform the instructional needs of each student.

At UPCS, a whole-school effort consisting of a shared mission and vision is coupled with a common instructional framework and explicit learning expectations (academic, social, and civic) guides all instructional and programmatic planning, focused on providing students with learning opportunities that lead to academic success.

In sum

Each endeavor required leadership to galvanize a community-wide focus on impacting students' skills through targeted research-based practices supported by clear expectations and structures to assist teachers in their classrooms, informed by the regular use of data. Clear expectations (e.g., a mission, vision, and specific academic goals) and explicit use of research-based instructional practices dramatically increase the likelihood that core and tiered instruction will remain rigorous and internally consistent across classrooms and grades. Without mission-driven expectations AND research-based practices, it is difficult to ensure that high-quality instruction is afforded to every student, regardless of their academic level or background. Moreover, the academic and social culture of the school is one in which students have the opportunity to see themselves as learners and academic beings who can and do succeed.

While a school does not necessarily have to pursue the specific strategies and use of resources as detailed in these case narratives, the cases show that it is possible to accelerate and sustain improvement annually, and over time.

ARTIFACT LISTS

The following provides a listing of key artifacts that illustrate the practices described in each case, including the presentation that each school provided to the Leadership Network on February 8, 2023.

Belmont Community School

Presentation

Selected Artifacts and Examples

1. We are Mathematicians.
2. Sample Lesson Plan
3. Belmont Accelerated Math Blueprint
4. Small Steps Big Changes Presentation
5. Parallel Tasks – Open Questions Presentation
6. MTSS Math Presentation
7. Math Standards and Big Ideas

Chandler Magnet School

Presentation

Selected Artifacts and Examples

1. Table of contents
2. Introductory Message to Staff
3. Pilot- Grade 1: Example of remote learning schedule in which students clicked on the image of their teacher to access classroom link.
4. What is MTSS? District document used to support our overall work.
5. Why Calibration? School based PD for teachers to calibrate their understanding and implementation of BAS; including resource on reading behaviors.
6. Data meeting schedule
7. Grade 1 MTSS meeting notes: Shows example of data meeting notes; meetings were held for all 7 grade levels (K-6). These meetings gave teachers the opportunity to speak candidly (yet professionally) about their students' needs and teachers able to provide additional factors that are not obtainable from BOY assessment results.
8. Grade 1 Acceleration Teacher assignments.
9. Grade 5 Acceleration Teacher assignments.
10. LLI Material Assignment
11. Primary Weekly Routine document which demonstrates a sample weekly routine.
12. Sample Acceleration Lesson Routine (Intermediate)
13. Sample Acceleration Lesson Routine (Early Readers)
14. Comprehension Guide including sample questions for lesson routines
15. Comprehension Resources including graphic organizers to support various comprehension foci
16. Literacy Group Notetaker: Anecdotal note taker (completed weekly) - Notes inform subsequent lessons.
17. Student Progress Update Form: Educators fill out prior to the next data meeting

University Park Campus School

Presentation

Selected Artifacts and Examples

1. UPCS Mission, Vision, Values, and Expectations.
2. Common Instructional Framework
3. Academic Expectations

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks go out to the school leaders and educators who agreed to be interviewed by us and share their thoughts and experience in pursuing student achievement in their schools for the purpose of this study.

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