

Schools Take Major Steps to Prepare Students to Be College- and Career-Ready



More high school students today are graduating college-ready, career-ready or both, thanks to an emphasis by modern business and industry, strong support from states and more rigorous learning experiences at schools across the nation.

It has been said many times, but now it is sinking in. From hospitals to factories, employees need to know how to function individually and as a team, how to assess information accurately and how to diagnose problems to make instant decisions.

Most states have stepped up by adopting rigorous educational content standards; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has created math and literacy collaboratives to infuse those two essentials into academic and career-technical courses. Also, SREB has worked with states to develop Advanced Career (AC) pathways to technically advanced, in-demand occupations.

This newsletter explores how schools are upgrading and how teachers are becoming more fully equipped to ready students for college, careers or both. The instruction features hands-on projects that students can readily grasp while learning, as well as assessments that guide teachers in adjusting instruction to meet students' needs. All efforts are standards-based so that students receive what they deserve in education.

Implementing Rigorous State Standards for Literacy in CT Centers

Teachers steadily are learning about the new state college- and career-readiness standards for English/ language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Some teachers are surprised to hear the standards apply to literacy in social studies, science and technical subjects.

SREB

High Schools
That Work

“Two goals of the standards are to provide students with instruction that asks them to read more in a content area and to write more in response to their reading,” said **Debbie Hall**, SREB reading and writing specialist. “Teachers want to know how to meet those goals in technology centers.”

Reading Standards

The state college- and career-readiness standards for literacy in science and technical subjects — also known as RSTs — for grades six through 12 align closely with ELA literacy standards in wording and focus, Hall noted. The major difference is that the science and technical standards are content-specific.

For example, the first ELA standard for grades 11 and 12 directs students to *“Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.”*

The first science and technical standard for students in grades 11 and 12 is very similar: “Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts, attending to important distinctions the author makes and to any gaps or inconsistencies in the account.”

The major difference is that the science and technical standard addresses science and technical texts instead of general texts. “The remaining nine science and technical standards compare to the ELA reading standards in the same way,” Hall said.

Writing Standards

Another goal of state college- and career-readiness standards is for students to respond in writing to the texts they read. The writing standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects — also known as WHSTs — for grades six through 12 align closely with ELA writing standards.

For example, the first ELA writing standard for grades 11 and 12 indicates that students will *“Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.”* The first WHST for grades 11 and 12 asks students to *“Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.”*

Hall said the emphasis on content writing is the major difference between the two standards and that the other nine WHSTs compare to the ELA writing standards in the same manner.



Preparing CT Teachers

The SREB Technology Centers That Work (TCTW) initiative is preparing teachers to address the RSTs and the WHSTs through the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC). During the 2012-13 school year, 14 shared-time centers in Pennsylvania and nine centers in South Carolina worked with Hall to develop content-specific LDC modules that are hard-wired to the state college- and career-readiness standards.

“These two- to four-week projects addressed topics such as the history of the flush toilet, the impact of body art on employability and the best brand of tire to use on local roads,” Hall said. Students read a variety of cognitively complex texts related to their topics and wrote authentic documents like the ones required in their career fields of study.

“The LDC structure and materials required teachers to change the way they approached lesson planning and to become more focused on teaching the skills embedded in the state college- and career-readiness standards,” Hall said.

Teachers' comments about their experiences with the rigorous state standards and LDC implementation at technical centers have been positive:

- **Greene County Career and Technology Center, Pennsylvania**

Desiree Dennison: *"My students were reluctant at first; they avoided reading and made excuses. After a few days, they began to change. They were more responsive to the work and performed better on exams. Their writing improved."*

Shawn Golden: *"I plan to integrate more literacy through journaling prompts, authentic writing and trade magazine reading."*

Rob Barclay: *"Students were very negative at first about writing an essay in shop class, but they worked through it a little each day. I believe their finished products were easier to complete than they expected."*

- **Jules E. Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical School, Pennsylvania**

James Jesberger: *"LDC helped students take ownership of the task and do their own research."*

- **Randolph Career and Technical High School, Pennsylvania**

Will Soleau: *"Students began to build confidence in their ability to read and write."*

- **Edward W. Bok Technical High School, Pennsylvania**

Denise Powell: *"The writing tasks made my students more willing to work through a project than they were in the past. They realized that writing doesn't happen instantly and takes work."*

- **Florence Career Center, South Carolina**

Shadaris Bradley: *"I was pleasantly surprised at the level of thinking my students are capable of when they are not just regurgitating information back to me. The teachers were genuinely excited about what some of the students produced."*

Participating teachers in the two states developed more than 40 modules during the year; many teachers planned to continue creating modules in 2013-14. "For those teachers, LDC is the best way to address the college- and career-readiness standards in all areas of the curriculum," Hall said.

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Blending Rigorous State Standards, LDC and National Science Standards in the Classroom: Teachers Make It Work

In an increasingly complex world, science students need to learn how to read and research information and write about it to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the content. The state college- and career-readiness standards, the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are intertwined in teaching students how to understand and communicate science information.

State college- and career-readiness standards:

The state standards require three "shifts" in English/ language arts and literacy:

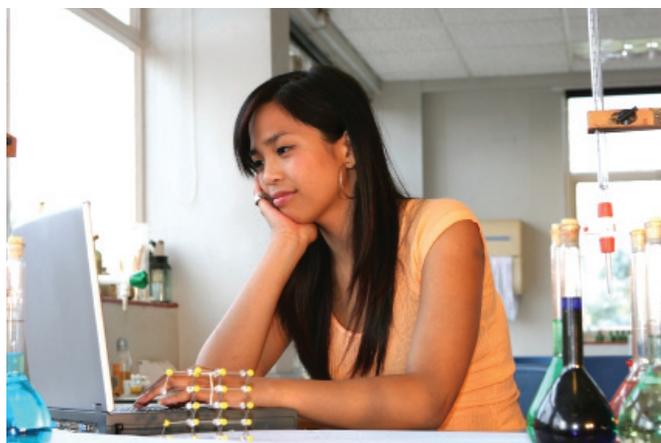
1. **Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction:** Nonfiction comprises the vast majority of required reading in college and the workplace.

Informational text is harder for students to comprehend than narrative text. The state standards support students in learning how to read different types of informational texts.

2. **Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from literary and informational texts:** Most college and workplace writing requires evidence. Being able to locate and deploy evidence is a hallmark of a strong reader and writer.
3. **Regular practice with complex texts and related academic language:** What students can read in terms of complexity is the greatest predictor of success in college (2006 ACT study).

Too many students read at too low a level. The state standards include a staircase of increasing complexity from elementary school through high school. The standards also focus on building a generic academic vocabulary for comprehension.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) — In 2007 a Carnegie Foundation commission of researchers and public and private leaders concluded, “The nation’s capacity to innovate for economic growth and the ability of American workers to thrive in the modern workforce depend on a broad foundation of math and science learning.” Unfortunately, American students lag behind others in math and science performance. The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education identified 16 career clusters, including 14 that call for four years of science and two that call for three years. To keep their options open and maximize their opportunities, all students should follow a rigorous program in math and science.



The new science standards have three dimensions:

1. **Practices** describe behaviors of scientists as they investigate and build models and theories about the natural world.
2. **Crosscutting concepts** can be applied across all domains of science; they link the different domains.
3. **Disciplinary Core Ideas** have broad importance across multiple science areas or may be a key organizing concept of a single discipline. They provide a tool for understanding or investigating complex ideas and solving problems; relate to students’ interests and life experiences or to societal or personal concerns; and are teachable and learnable over multiple grades at increasing levels of depth and sophistication.

Putting science standards to work in the science classroom means that students will have to read complex texts; research ideas and topics for classroom discussion and experimentation; be able to argue a point and back up statements with specific information from research and hands-on activities; and constantly read, write, speak and create.

Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) — One goal of LDC is to engage students in reading, comprehending, analyzing, interpreting and responding to complex texts. The LDC tools include a bank of reading and writing tasks, a module template and scoring rubrics. A great LDC teaching task:

- addresses content essential to the discipline;
- makes effective use of a writing type (argumentation, information/explanation or narrative);
- selects reading tasks that use and develop understanding and vocabulary;
- designs a writing prompt that requires sustained writing and effective use of ideas and evidence from the reading texts; and
- establishes a teaching task that is challenging and feasible for students and offers a balance of reading and writing demands.

Hallie Booth, regional literacy specialist for the **Northern Kentucky Cooperative for Educational Services** in Highland Heights, Kentucky, and **Josh Young**, science teacher at **Holmes Middle School** in Covington, Kentucky, showed teachers how to use the three concepts of state standards, LDC and science standards to enrich the classroom. Science teachers can make it possible for students to read and research information and create rich written pieces that demonstrate in-depth knowledge and applications.

In one example, students at **Holmes Middle School** created their own NASCAR race car; students utilized all the knowledge they learned to make the car aerodynamic and stable. The students came up with their own design, made multiple trials for revision and supported their process by writing to explain any changes made to the car before the final run.

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Industry, Business and Education Partnership Brings Success to High School Students



Midlands Technical College (MTC) in Columbia, South Carolina, has formed a partnership to prepare high school students for college and careers. Working with the Fairfield County school district, MTC has established a “success center” at **Fairfield Central High School** (FCHS) in Winnsboro and has placed a college recruiter at the center to provide counseling and services to students and teachers. Local citizens and business and industry leaders joined MTC in providing time, expertise and funds for the endeavor.

“Local citizens, business and industry leaders and MTC have discovered that Fairfield Central students are extremely motivated and welcome assistance to be successful.”

Services such as MTC provides were needed in Fairfield County and at Fairfield Central High School. The unemployment rate in the county is 13 percent. The minority enrollment at the high school is 93 percent with 76 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

MTC historically had been viewed by the community as a technical college for students with very limited postsecondary options. Since the opening of the local MTC Fairfield Campus, which facilitates the Quick Jobs Program and the MTC success center at the high school, the perception about a technical college education has changed dramatically. In fact, MTC provides training for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers.

“A huge gap in the number of high-skill workers who could meet the growing demand of employers was leaving many positions unfilled or outsourced,” said **Stacey Gray-Feaster**, global career development facilitator for the Fairfield school district. “MTC is helping our community to bridge the gap by providing postsecondary career opportunities in health sciences; information technology; advanced manufacturing; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); and alternate energy.”

Pressley Dickson, program coordinator for MTC, staffs the success center as a full-time adviser. The center contains a career library and space for meetings and training sessions. Students and teachers can obtain financial and other information about postsecondary education. Students take college placement exams and can enroll in a dual high school and college credit program at no cost.

With very little traffic at the center in the beginning, Dickson began making classroom presentations and offering activities to attract students. Now, the center schedule is filled with college and career fairs, campus and business tours, employer interactions, a college application and career day and college and career workshops. Small-group sessions are provided on various topics such as “soft skills.”

The number of students from FCHS enrolling at Midlands Technical College rose dramatically from two students in 2011 to 51 students in fall 2013. The increase is attributed to the partnership with MTC and local industry.

“Local citizens, business and industry leaders and MTC have discovered that Fairfield Central students are extremely motivated and welcome assistance to be successful,” Dickson said. Future activities include the development of multiple partnerships and a STEM academy for students in grades six and seven.

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Putting State Policy Into Practice: Preparing Students for College and Careers



The principals of three high schools in the **Jefferson County Public Schools** district, Louisville, Kentucky, engaged SREB to lead teams of academic and career-technical (CT) teachers, counselors and administrators in increasing the number of students who are college- and career-ready.

Kentucky's Unbridled Learning Accountability Model is designed to ensure every student reaches his or her learning potential and graduates from high school ready for college and careers.

The model defines and quantifies college and career ready:

- College readiness is linked to benchmark scores on the ACT or ACT COMPASS exams.
- Career readiness is based on students' acquisition of industry certifications or passing the Kentucky Occupational Skills Standards Assessment (KOSSA) and achieving benchmark scores on the ACT, ACT COMPASS, ACT WorkKeys or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) exams. Students must complete at least three CT credits in a career pathway for industry certification to be recognized.

SREB consultants provided the CT faculty, counselors and administrators at each high school with three to five hours of intensive training focusing on quality career and technical education, including curriculum integration (CT and academic). During these sessions, the CT teachers reviewed data and developed CCR goals. They formed three focus teams chaired by CT teachers:

1. One focus team developed strategies to provide extra help for students.
2. Another team found ways to work more closely with academic teachers and increase teachers' expectations for student performance.

3. The third team joined with guidance specialists and advisory groups to improve CT course sequencing as a way to improve career readiness.

All three schools developed a system to review individual student course-taking patterns and assessment data. Because each school offers a different lineup of CT programs, the college- and career-readiness implementation plans reflect the differences.

Seneca High School offers agriculture, business, pre-law, education and early childhood career themes. Principal **Michelle Dillard** said the school implemented an extra-help, in-school intervention and enrichment program for students to receive personalized support for academic and career studies. During enrichment time, agriculture students met and worked various projects, including service and leadership. The pre-law students met with instructors (former attorneys) to hone their skills and prepare for mock trials. The informatics students learned from a former business executive who instructed them how to complete assignments that involved using technology to solve problems.



Bryce Hibbard is principal of **Southern High School**, where students enroll in business and information technology programs along with automotive and machine trades programs. The team at this school developed a system enabling students to chart their progress toward college and career readiness. The system includes a score card with checkpoints, including benchmarks and course completion. The team also developed a problem-based course for ninth-graders who have not selected a program of study.

Jeffersontown High School students have a choice of engineering, skilled trades (machining and welding) and business. Principal **Marty Polio**'s team of teachers and leaders worked together to give students needed support for college and career readiness. Class time each Friday was set aside for students to do online exam preparation for the ASVAB military exam. Teachers delivered industry certification prep camps and ACT prep camps. A senior blitz program was developed to ensure students understood the significance of being college- and career-ready, including the financial cost of remediation at the postsecondary level. Every senior met with an administrator regarding ACT benchmarking and

industry certification. "As students became college- or career-ready, we posted their photos in the hall so that others could see their achievements," Polio said.

After one year of working with SREB consultants, all three schools showed positive growth in preparing students for college and careers. The growth at each school exceeded that of the district.

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Students Engage in Hands-On Projects and Work-Based Learning to Prepare for College and Careers

The mission of **Summit Technology Academy** (STA) in Lee's Summit, Missouri, is to prepare students for both college and careers. A total of 380 students attend the shared-time center. "College and career are equal," said **Paul Rutherford**, math, physics and engineering teacher at STA. "One is not more important than the other. We are getting students ready to put clothes on their backs and a roof over their heads."



The academy blends rigorous academic learning with career-technical studies. The emphasis on project- and work-based learning is paying off in student jobs, certifications and college enrollment.

- STA students surpass other schools in meeting the HSTW readiness goals (73 percent compared with 56 percent at all HSTW sites).

- The percentage of STA students completing the HSTW-recommended curriculum in English was 57 percent in 2012, compared with 29 percent in 2010.
- The percentage of STA students completing the HSTW-recommended math curriculum was 90 percent in 2012, compared with 64 percent in 2010.
- The number of STA graduates enrolled in remedial courses in postsecondary education decreased from 50 percent in 2011 to 41 percent in 2012.
- More than 90 percent of STA's Project Lead The Way (PLTW) students taking digital electronics/computer-aided manufacturing and matriculating to the capstone engineering design and development course earn engineering degrees.
- More than 70 percent of STA's network essentials students earn CompTIA A+ certification.

Rutherford's students in an engineering field experiences class played a role in a state highway project as part of their authentic learning experiences. A stretch of highway running east and west through Lee's Summit was in need of development, and students were assigned to come up with a design plan. The students were organized into five design teams, each of which selected a portion of the highway to develop. Throughout the semester, Rutherford and an engineering staff member from the Lee's Summit Public Works Department taught students the various aspects of land development and design.

At the end of the project, each team presented its design to the public works department engineering staff, city council members, city officials, parents and school leaders. “The mayor noticed that many of the students’ ideas were new to the engineering staff,” Rutherford said. “In past projects, students’ ideas have been incorporated into the city’s actual design and eventual construction nine times out of 10.”

Advertising Project

Students in the academy’s digital media and entertainment course tackled an advertising project in collaboration with a new water park in the Kansas City area. The course makes it possible for students to produce digitally composed music as well as quality videos. STA students helped write an ad, did on-location shooting with the mayor of Kansas City and edited a DVD that was used to entice businesses to the water park.

Adviser/Advisee Program Includes Digital Portfolios to Help Students Prepare for the Future

High school students attending **James Rumsey Technical Institute** in Martinsburg, West Virginia, benefit from technology, project-based learning and a strong adviser/advisee program providing opportunities to explore employment and postsecondary education options. Students meet with their advisers once a week, complete job-related assignments and develop digital portfolios of their aspirations and accomplishments.

The institute supports the adviser/advisee program by developing lesson plans, model lessons, handouts and rubrics for each assignment. “One assignment asks students to do research and write a report on how to buy a car,” said **Alisa Cushwa**, support services coordinator. “The students interview bank loan officers to obtain financial information.” Cushwa works with counselors and a work-based learning coordinator to provide meaningful experiences for students in the program.

A digital portfolio for each student is the major product that comes from the adviser/advisee program. A portfolio contains a résumé, a letter of introduction to employers and a job application. Each component is evaluated with a rubric. References and letters of recommendation are also included in the portfolio.

STA offers four courses through which students can earn professional certifications: nursing (certified nursing assistant); IT essentials (Cisco certified entry network technician); network essentials (Cisco certified network associate); and network security (Cisco security certification).

Work-based learning is available to students through internships in the IT essentials course and the network security course. “These internships have resulted in some students getting full-time, well-paying jobs right out of high school,” Rutherford said.

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Students update the digital portfolios to add accomplishments such as perfect attendance, honor roll or other recognition of achievements. Instructors encourage but do not require students to submit portfolios online. “The online portfolios can be viewed by potential employers with the permission of students to expedite the application process,” Cushwa said.



Earning Grades

Portfolios are graded on a 100-point scale that addresses education/training, work experience, skills and qualifications, references, quality of information, grammar and punctuation, following directions, project effort, résumé format, necessary information and effect.

During adviser/advisee sessions, students work with graphic organizers to identify their personal interests and the jobs that would most attract them. The organizer includes job responsibilities, physical requirements, work schedules and advancement opportunities. Students use the West Virginia Division of Labor's website as a major resource for the organizers.

"The graphic organizers provide information about educational requirements and responsibilities in different employment positions," Cushwa said. "They are designed to assist students in planning transitions from high school to postsecondary education or careers." Cushwa said information on the graphic organizers has yielded higher success rates for students obtaining employment in their fields or obtaining additional college certifications and/or degrees.

Standards-Based Grading Takes the 'Behavior' Out of Students' Scores

Spring Hill High School, a rural school in Columbia, Tennessee, enrolling just over 900 students, has been implementing a standards-based grading system since the start of the 2010-11 school year. The school demographics are 75 percent white, 15 percent black, 8 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and .2 percent Native American/Alaskan. Approximately 31 percent are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Principal **Richard Callahan** and school leaders noticed a discrepancy between students' grades and their performance on end-of-course (EOC) exams. "Passing the EOC is our goal for all students, so we developed instruction to coincide with the standards on these exams," he said.

Teacher **Pauline Vanderhoef** worked with Callahan to show the lack of connection between grades and EOC performance. They were especially disturbed by the number of students earning A's who were unable to pass an EOC. "Grades were more a measure of behavior than a predictor of success," Callahan said.

The adviser/advisee program allows instructors to mentor their students, a practice that has been instrumental in boosting students' success rates. Human resources managers, entrepreneurs from the community, and representatives from technical schools and colleges support information provided by instructors.

Rodney Strawderman, work-based learning coordinator, maintains a database of business and industry contacts and helps students find jobs. He collects data annually to track students' employment placements as well as postsecondary education achievements. The most recent reports indicated 99 percent overall placement in employment, 83 percent in-field and 98 percent in-field continuing education. "A total of 170 students are registered on the Workforce West Virginia Jobs website," Strawderman said.

The institute emphasizes the integration of academic content into CT classes. This approach helps students gain important knowledge and skills that will contribute to their success in careers and further education.

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"Well-behaved students received higher grades than students with discipline problems."



Backwards Mapping

Callahan and his team "backwards mapped" the standards on EOCs and devised a logical progression of instruction that would prepare students for EOCs at the end of the year. They focused on laying out the needed

skills and then teaching those skills. Grades were not a measure of how much homework students did or how neat their papers looked. “Students were assessed solely on mastery of the skills,” Callahan said. “The quizzes resembled the structure of EOC items they would see later.”

How did standards-based grading help students?

“Rather than seeing a 75 percent grade and thinking a student had passed, I could now see that the student passed four out of five standards on a quiz but failed to pass one standard,” Vanderhoef said. “It enabled me to offer more targeted help for that student. When I know exactly where a student is deficient, I can provide assistance until he or she understands the content.”

By the end of the year, class grades reflected performance on EOCs, and the passing rate of students showed a general increase. “Standards-based grading has become more than a simple diagnostic tool for predicting success,” Vanderhoef said. “It has become an avenue for improving instruction and increasing achievement.”

Charting the Results

Callahan pointed out that another important measurement tool is to compare graduating seniors’ GPAs with their ACT scores. “All Spring Hill juniors take the ACT in March, which gives us data on every grad,” Callahan said. “We have at least one ACT score on every graduate, except for some out-of-state transfers to our school. Many of our students choose to take the ACT one or two more times before graduation, and we use their highest score in our charting.

“I have charted our last three graduating classes, and we can see a much better relationship between GPAs and ACT scores,” Callahan continued. “I have also charted the data we have as of fall 2013 on the upcoming

graduating class of 2014 now that we have ACT scores on each student. The chart shows the relationship with GPAs through the junior year and will be revised after they graduate.

“This is especially significant, since this is the first group that will graduate having been graded for mastery throughout their entire high school experience,” Callahan said. “They also had a good foundation, because our freshman academy teachers strongly bought into the standards-based grading approach back in fall 2010.”

Spring Hill’s guidelines for standards-based grading are:

- Share the grading and assessment plans with students and parents.
- Make samples of student work available when assignments are made.
- Build rubrics and other scoring guidelines with students.
- Share feedback and scores with students, and encourage them to keep records.
- Explain the process and principles to students.

Why should schools consider adopting standards-based grading? Callahan said the approach:

- provides clear, accurate feedback;
- maintains consistent focus on learning rather than on compliance;
- communicates readiness for the next level;
- promotes a better match between grades and standardized or state assessment results; and
- leads to a culture motivating all students to achieve.

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School Culture Is Transformed Through Literacy

Marshall Junior High School (MJHS) in the east Texas town of Marshall enrolls 760 students in grades seven and eight. The ethnicity of the school is 37 percent black, 33 percent Hispanic, 29 percent white and 1 percent other ethnicities. Seventy-one percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

During the decade leading up to 2012, the school went from being one of the district’s recognized campuses to being deemed “academically unacceptable” by both state and federal standards. The position of principal changed hands five times and the percentage of veteran teachers (five or more years of experience) dropped from 80 percent to 30 percent.

As a result, MJHS lost many best practices that had made the school a “district flagship,” and staff members had to discover effective practices on their own. Many teachers worked in isolation, team planning was sporadic, and rigorous classroom instruction was the exception rather than the norm. Worst of all, literacy scores plummeted below state and federal expectations.

New Leadership

In summer 2012, the district superintendent appointed **David Segers** as principal and **Melissa Fincher** as academic dean at MJHS. “We knew our priority was to implement an effective system for school improvement that would make a positive impact on classroom instruction and student achievement,” Segers said.

The new MJHS leadership team talked with focus team leaders, reviewed information and recommendations from a MMGW site development workshop, analyzed student assessment data and collected observation data before establishing the following goals for year one:

- Stop the decline! Keep students’ scores from dropping and increase student achievement in all subject areas.
- Increase instructional rigor and student engagement in learning.
- Align instruction to standards within each subject area.
- Move from isolation to collaboration. Talk about teaching and learning!



School leaders decided that the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) was just the tool needed to begin the school improvement process. They believed the LDC framework would support school goals, address the main

areas of need and provide a system to transform school culture. The main areas of need were identified as:

- **Content and Curriculum** — Texas has not adopted the Common Core State Standards; the state curriculum instead is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the Texas College- and Career-Readiness Standards (CCRS). These standards require a high level of rigor and literacy in all subject areas — something LDC promotes. “State standards say what must be taught in every subject, while the LDC framework tells how to address content requirements and embed literacy in every content area,” Segers said.
- **Classroom Instruction** — Data from classroom observations indicated that instruction at MJHS lacked rigor, was usually teacher-led and teacher-centered, and often resulted in low student engagement. In some cases, instruction was not standards-based. Since the LDC templates help teachers create rigorous, student-centered, standards-based tasks, the LDC framework seemed to be just what the school needed. “The fact that literacy supports all subjects meant that we could focus on one major, campus-wide initiative,” Segers said.
- **Communication and Collaboration** — The LDC framework provides a way for teachers and administrators to talk about teaching and learning. In addition to providing a common vocabulary for lesson design, LDC templates make it possible for teachers to plan and align instruction as well as work together to design tasks. The LDC scoring rubrics provide a common tool for all stakeholders — teachers, administrators, students and parents — to discuss student work and achievement. “We felt the LDC framework was what we needed to focus on teaching and learning as we met in teams, provided feedback and assessed progress,” Segers said.

Making Progress

In only one year of implementing the LDC framework, MJHS made progress in meeting its goals. Classroom observation data showed an increase in the levels of rigor and student engagement in most classrooms. Students are seated in groups to facilitate conversations and activities that allow them to learn from one another. Student work is posted in classrooms and hallways to show that students are reading and writing in every classroom.

Regularly scheduled teacher planning meetings have replaced the sporadic team meetings of the past. Teachers meet in a new data room where they plan with the academic dean and another administrator. “Teachers talk about instruction, often in the form of an LDC module or mini-task,” Fincher said. “They meet weekly to examine student work and sometimes gather to score the work. Using a tuning protocol, they systematically examine LDC products.”

The administrative team conducts group “learning walks” to monitor implementation and calibrate understanding of the LDC framework, student engagement and instructional rigor. The team shares its observations with the staff on a new color-coded form and also conducts individual feedback sessions. These meaningful dialogues have improved communication of expectations for teaching and learning and have promoted a shared understanding of instructional rigor and student engagement across the campus.

A review of student assessment data shows that MJHS students made gains of five percentage points in all subject areas in 2012-13. In addition, MJHS students met state standards in all but one category — closing the achievement gap. The difference was only two percentage points.

“We firmly believe that the second year of the LDC initiative will bring increased achievement for all students,” Segers said.

English/Language Arts teachers at MJHS made these comments about the first year of LDC:

“My students are more engaged, both in working with other students and when working independently. They want their voices to be heard. They want to share their knowledge.”

“I learned many new things and really enjoyed watching my students get into the lessons.”

Science teachers at MJHS had these observations:

“I was surprised how much my students could do on their own. They were really engaged.”

“LDC challenges students’ minds to really think about the objective at hand. I have noticed that students are asking more questions.”

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Transitioning to TCTW: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly



Elkhart Area Career Center (EACC) is a shared-time technology center in Elkhart, Indiana. It enrolls 1,005 students from 16 sending high schools.

“We were always told we were number one, and we liked it,” said center director **Bill Kovach**. The problem was that the data didn’t show it. To turn things around,

the center focused on the good (knowing it is a good center), the bad (data sources that disagree) and the ugly (how to make the transition).

When Kovach became director in 2010, he began the transition journey by holding an open, honest discussion with the staff. “I told them I genuinely wanted to hear what was wrong, what was working and what was frustrating them,” Kovach said. The staff recognized his commitment and began to buy into making changes at the center.

Joining TCTW

In 2012, the center chose SREB’s Technology Centers That Work (TCTW) initiative as its model for school improvement. It administered the SREB High Schools That Work (HSTW) Senior Assessment and Survey (also used for TCTW sites) in January and participated in a site development workshop led by a TCTW team.

Other milestones included a workshop on how to create a high-performing learning culture, a data review session, a TCTW leadership forum and a TCTW Technical Assistance Visit.

“I can’t stress enough what it meant to have SREB come in and do the workshops,” said **Brenda Emerson**, the center’s education to careers coordinator. “The data from the assessment, which measures a wide range of student knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics and science, was revealing,” she said.

The data showed that 70 percent of Elkhart students scored below the Basic performance level in literacy readiness, while 60 percent scored Basic in numeracy readiness and 61 percent scored below Basic in science readiness. “We hit the reset button in fall 2012 because what we were doing was not working like we wanted it to,” Kovach said.

Teachers Feel Ownership

Teachers formed a steering committee, focus groups and four outreach groups (business, community, middle grades schools and sending schools). “Teachers felt a sense of ownership, because they picked the goals for each outreach group,” Kovach said.

“Elkhart wanted to get rid of the stigma that the center was meant for students who didn’t want to go to college,” said **Amber Kosar**, advertising design teacher. “We wanted to have outreach to ensure that staff and students at the sending schools know what is offered at the center.” In addition, center staff members made

plans to meet with middle grades students early so they could arrange their schedules to attend the center in grade 11. Other goals were to solicit input from business and industry on how to prepare students for the real world of work and to develop a career- and college-ready focus group.

Changes in Staff Meetings

The administration also made changes in staff meetings. The assessment data are reviewed at every meeting, and staff members meet in small groups to discuss the data indicators. One hundred percent of leaders and teachers are involved in the process.

Jaime Stith, automotive services teacher, said it was an “aha” moment to attend a TCTW leadership forum with other staff members, where they discussed the importance of integrating reading and mathematics into the curriculum and of allowing students to struggle to solve problems. “When the center began to do these two things, students were energized and scores went up,” Stith said.

Elkhart’s school improvement effort is still in its infancy. The future will bring more TCTW training, more staff outreach and a five-year improvement plan being developed by administrators and staff working together.

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