

George Read Middle School

Colonial School District
New Castle, Delaware

By Holly Grieshop Sage, Principal

A Model of:

- All-inclusive Community
- Strong Staff-Student Relationships
- Rigorous Instructional Practices
- Focus on Literacy
- Data-driven Instruction
- “Zeros Are Not Tolerated” Policy

By the Numbers:

- 807 Students
- 43% African-American students
- 35% Caucasian students
- 19% Hispanic students
- 2% Asian students
- 19% Students with disabilities
- 4% ELL
- 99% Attendance rate
- 63% Free lunch/8% Reduced lunch
- 59% Students reading on grade level
- Met AYP for 2 consecutive years

Executive Summary

In four short years, George Read Middle School went from the school to be “choiced from” to the school to be “choiced to” in a low socio-economic suburban area of Delaware. George Read Middle School is a sixth through eighth grade school located in New Castle, Delaware. The school’s approximately 800 students are 43% African American and 19% Hispanic, and 71% free and reduced lunch. The school is organized into small teams. Teachers have an opportunity to get to know their students more closely and work with a few other teachers on how to best meet their students’ needs. George Read was considered a school under improvement for the majority of the past ten years by the Delaware Department of Education. In 2011 and 2012, George Read made AYP. High expectations, rigorous coursework, and a strong sense of community led to these positive results.

George Read Middle School lives by the school motto, “Where Ownership Leads to Excellence.” George Read is fostering teacher and student excellence by encouraging personal choices that lead to individual accountability. High expectations motivate students to make good choices academically and behaviorally. Seventy-one percent of the students recognize that the school has high expectations according to the 2012 WE Survey, compared to sixty-six percent nationally in the same year. And sixty-six percent of the students reported that they are rewarded for doing well academically. George Read is an all-inclusive environment. Once the school moved away from a token economy, student responsibility and engagement increased. This school is warm and welcoming. Students are respectful, well behaved, and compassionate. This is a transformation from the school of four years ago. Leadership contributes the change to living

the vision.

While building a positive school culture, the school focused on raising student achievement. Over the past three years, this school has engaged in an intensive professional development program focused on a deep understanding of the curriculum, learning high impact strategies, and engaging students in their learning. Teachers learned to collaborate around the curriculum within their content and focus on data within their teams. Additionally, all teachers have come together to assume responsibility for literacy instruction. Teacher relationships have improved, and teacher-student relationships have strengthened.

Foundation Learning

In the past year, George Read increased seventh and eighth grade math scores by 19.4 and 28.9 percentage points respectively. Seventh grade scores went from 44.7% in 2011 to 64.10% in 2012. Eighth grade scores went from 43% in 2011 to 71.9% in 2012. From 2011 to 2012, Hispanic students grew 28 percentage points in 7th grade and 29 percentage points in 8th grade. In the same years, African American students grew 15 percentage points in 7th grade and 10 percentage points in 8th grade. In addition, low SES students increased proficiency by 19 and 22 percentage points in 7th and 8th grade respectively. George Read's success is attributed to:

- **Prioritization of the Curriculum:** In grade-level content meetings within the district, teachers collaborated to create an outline for each unit. The outlines included the overall goal of the unit, the goal of each lesson, essential vocabulary, and identified skills necessary to reach each goal. The teachers display the outlines in their classroom for student reference. During the planning and teaching of each lesson, it is expected that the teacher and the student utilize the outline multiple times throughout the process.
- **Implementation of High Impact Instructional Strategies:** Professional development on instructional strategies was provided for all staff based upon a needs inventory. Building leadership provided follow-up support for each topic. After a reasonable amount of time, these strategies became building expectations and were monitored by building leadership. The following strategies are now the norm at George Read:
 - Use of graphic organizers in every lesson
 - Implementation of higher-order thinking questions in every lesson
 - Extended thinking activities in every unit
 - Use of collaborative pairs every period
 - Student summary of information multiple times per period

After two years of intensive professional development and implementation of high impact strategies, teachers (92%) and students (81%) reported in the WE Surveys that classroom rigor was present, and 100% of the teachers understand it is an expectation to use a variety of strategies to help students.

- **Professional Learning Communities:** Teachers meet by content and grade level, at a minimum, twice per week. One of the meetings must be focused on student data. The administrators are trained in the process of data-driven instruction and coach teachers in effective planning and implementation. The majority of teachers have found the PLC process to be useful, necessary, and good for professional practice. These teachers

often meet daily with their counterparts to discuss instructional strategies and student achievement. In the last two years, teachers have begun to focus on what the students have learned versus what has been taught; therefore, student success is at the center of all discussions. Additional teaming includes monthly vertical articulation.

- Literacy across the Content: A committee was formed consisting of one staff member from each of the content areas. The teachers identified areas of need in our literacy program across the board. Next, research was conducted to identify best practices to address the deficits. Detailed lessons were presented to each department, offering staff the opportunity to practice each strategy. The examples in every lesson were specific to each content area, therefore demonstrating how to implement the strategies within their content area. Topics ranged from two-column notes, summaries, to the SWAP method (method to help answer questions).
- Intervention: Every student who needs extra support in either math or reading is provided with an intervention program, which includes acceleration and remediation. Our schedule provides a daily thirty-minute time period during the day for teachers to work with struggling students. In addition, we offer one-hour support classes for our most at-risk students. Intervention time is fluid, allowing students to move between classes and/or teachers depending on individual math and/or reading needs. Also, an extra-time program runs twice per week after school as added support for students. They can meet with a classroom teacher or work on a computer-based program.

George Read lives by the mantra, “What gets monitored gets done!” The principal sets expectations in her Monday morning notes. Communication is clear and concise, and targets what the administrators will look for during the weekly walkthroughs and PLC observations. George Read teachers implement what they learn, and administrators provide feedback structured to move instruction forward, thus engaging in the cycle of continuous improvement.

Learner Engagement

George Read moved to an all-inclusive culture and witnessed more contented and engaged students, and improved teacher-student relationships. According to the 2012 WE survey, 79% of the staff felt as though students could discuss academic problems and concerns with them, and 81% of students felt as though teachers helped them. Seventy-four percent of the students believed what they are learning in school will help them in the future and seventy-seven percent wanted to do better academically. Students (70%) believed they are encouraged to explore things they find interesting.

Before moving to an inclusive community, George Read was a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) school. In the PBS culture, many students did not earn enough shields to participate in schoolwide events such as skating parties. In the new environment, students are no longer excluded from any schoolwide functions. We found that positive inclusion was more of a motivator for our students. Several of the students excluded from activities had never had the opportunity to attend any events in the past because of behavior. Therefore, the student did not know what he/she was missing. We found that by including everyone in events students

began to show improvement in their behavior. The students looked forward to the next event.

- **Pep Rallies:** At the end of each marking period, a pep rally is held to identify students who made strides during the nine-week timeframe. Staff members are encouraged to choose students who are not the “typical” award recipients; thereby, ensuring that each student is given the opportunity to be acknowledged in front of their peers. These students also are given the opportunity to participate in the featured event (scooter races, pie-throwing contests, water balloon tosses, staff head shavings, etc.). The pep rallies are also used to encourage continued positive academic and behavioral success.
- **Team Contests:** Students on each team worked together to earn points. The team with the highest number of points at the end of the year was given the opportunity to choose their prize. Contests included: hallway decorating, least of number of referrals, canned food drive, box tops for education, most participation on spirit day, etc.
- **Events:** In order to encourage school involvement, we have offered a variety of events and activities to appeal to a wide range of students. For example, students can attend a GR-only skating party at the local roller rink. We offered dances at night and student vs. faculty games (*i.e.*, basketball). Parents and siblings are also invited to attend these events. During the school day, eighth grade students had the opportunity to play basketball after finishing their lunch at least twice per month.
- **Celebrating Successes:** Rather than holding formal ceremonies for honor roll, Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System scores and improvement, and positive behavior recognition, students are now given the opportunity to choose their reward experience. The students have chosen to do ice cream parties, movie time, a dance during the day, and water-ice parties.

As a result, student behavior referrals decreased. From 2010-11 to 2011-12, the number of sixth grade referrals dropped from 1,038 to 741. In addition, the 2010-11 sixth-grade cohort reduced the number of referrals by 404 in seventh grade.

The school has adopted the motto of “OLE” (Where Ownership Leads to Excellence) to drive all choices and decisions made at George Read by students and staff. The overall goal of OLE is to have all stakeholders be accountable and responsible when making choices. For example, staff members are given autonomy to implement programs that best meet the needs of the individual students rather than using the “cookie cutter” program for all students. The teachers have taken this task seriously, knowing that their decision directly impacts student achievement and their student growth portion of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System. In addition, students are always asked, “Why did you make that choice?” during conversations regarding behavior. Therefore, the students are forced to take ownership of their actions and brainstorm alternative actions. OLE permeates every facet of the day. On the morning announcements, the closing statement is “This was Mrs. Sage with your morning announcements. Make it a great day or not by owning your actions, behavior, and attitude. As always, the choice is yours.” The students have gotten in the habit of reciting the conclusion with the principal daily. At the end of each week, OLE awards are given to staff and students. Stakeholders are nominated by their peers in the building for academic successes, citizenship, and character. Each recipient is included in the announcements and is thereby recognized by the entire school community. Each student also gets to choose a prize from the basket as a reward and receives a certificate

that includes the reason he/she was nominated and the nominator. The OLE awards have been a great motivator in that students not recognized often ask staff what they need to do to get nominated. The motto of OLE has been invaluable in the transformation of GR.

Stretch Learning

Student achievement is soaring at George Read and is a result of increased rigor in the classroom. The average student accountability score in Algebra increased 34 points between 2011 (864 avg score) to 2012 (900 avg score). The number of students scoring advanced went from 16 in 2011 to 31 in 2012 with no students below proficiency. Students who have demonstrated success on the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) in mathematics and algebra readiness test are invited to take Integrated Mathematics (9th grade math course) in eighth grade. In addition, parents have the opportunity to request placement for their child; this allows for the students who do not test well but are up for the challenge. In order to increase the success of the students, changes were made to the delivery of the Integrated Math course:

- **Change of Instructor:** Mathematical knowledge was used to choose the instructor for the course, as opposed to tenure. The new instructor possesses multiple mathematical degrees including middle school and secondary mathematics, accounting, and business. His depth of knowledge allows him to meet the needs of struggling students. His breadth of knowledge allows him to accelerate students beyond the course standards.
- **Making Connections to Middle School Curriculum:** Because students taking Integrated Mathematics are not exposed to the third year of the middle school curriculum, they sometimes struggle with the higher-level concepts. The instructor's deep mathematical understanding allows him to evaluate student gaps and use grade-appropriate materials to teach the concept on their grade level to build a foundation to increase understanding.
- **Open Invitation to Delaware Technical College for Students:** The instructor teaches Algebra I at Delaware Technical College. The students are offered the opportunity to attend classes one night per week. This affords them the opportunity to experience college classes and gain an in-depth understanding of the concepts and skills.
- **Using Algebra Students as Tutors:** During enrichment each day, the instructor uses the Integrated Math students as peer tutors for students struggling in mathematics. The program provides academic success for the tutor and the struggling student. The tutors gain a deeper understanding as they explain and teach mathematical concepts. In addition, the struggling students are gaining self-confidence and a broader understanding of mathematics.

A second strategy that addresses the needs of struggling math students is George Read's Acceleration and Previewing Class. Students are selected to join the acceleration class based on their Fall DCAS scores. While the students all met the standard in mathematics, they scored within fifteen points of the cut score. Teachers want to ensure that the students continue to grow. The program consists of a computer component and an explicit teaching component. The teacher creates a unique learning sequence for each student, based on their needs as

identified through various measures (DCAS, teacher input, pre-/post-test). The students work on the identified area of focus for two and one-half hours every week for at least eighteen weeks. The computer portion of the program relies heavily on grade-level reading skills to comprehend the mathematics being taught. Therefore, students receive support in both content areas. As you can see in the chart below, the participating students outperformed students across the state in math and reading on the 2012 DCAS.

| Grade | Math State Increase | Math GR Increase | GR vs. State Math | Reading State Increase | Reading GR Increase | GR vs. State Reading |
|-------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 06 | 54 | 61 | +7 | 46 | 62 | +16 |
| 07 | 40 | 53 | +13 | 34 | 59 | +25 |
| 08 | 42 | 63 | +21 | 34 | 75 | +41 |

Students falling in the lowest quartile receive additional enrichment. Teachers strive to meet the individual student needs and accelerate their learning through an array of interventions (*e.g.*, Compass Learning, Do the Math, Read About, REWARDS) and meeting with individual teachers to fill in the gaps in their learning. Students take ownership of their own learning by self-selecting after-school support in the areas they are struggling to learn. Teachers scaffold lessons, build background knowledge, and use differentiated graphic organizers to support students in the core classes.

Personal Skill Development

George Read is committed to increasing relevance for student learning. Community service projects and programs such as the Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium and WyldLife have impacted personal skill development and student achievement. Some of the effective programs are:

- Community Service Projects: Students at George Read participate in various activities to support our families and the community. GR continues to increase the number of projects, six so far in the 2012-13 school year compared to three the previous year.
 - Trick or Treat for UNICEF: We have collected over \$200 each year, over the past five years.
 - Juvenile Diabetes: We collected over \$300 this year and were recognized as the top collecting school in our district.
 - Canned Food Drive: We collected enough cans to aid 300 families in our community, up from the previous year of 210.
 - Recycling: We recycled 17,410 foil bags and drink pouches over the past two years.
 - Adopt-a-Family for Thanksgiving: We provided a full Thanksgiving dinner to 15 George Read families.
 - Box Tops for Education: This is an on-going team contest at this time.
- Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium: Fifteen students were selected to participate in a teen summit at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Students could choose from ten different sessions, ranging

in topics from college and career planning, to bullying, leadership, self-respect, and self-esteem. In addition to attending the sessions, the students were taught real-life social skills, such as appropriate table manners and volume control. One of our students was asked to introduce one of the esteemed speakers.

- **Leadership Awards:** In addition to the weekly OLE awards, sixth grade teachers recognize students who demonstrate outstanding leadership and citizenship inside and outside the classroom.
- **WyldLife:** This is a faith-based organization that meets bi-monthly to encourage students to learn more about themselves in an effort to become leaders within the school community. Each meeting allows for students to work together as a team to complete various activities, such as untying the human knot. The students then participate in a groupwide discussion/activity based around principles of faith. Lastly, students break up into small groups to share more personal experiences and get more feedback from mentors.
- **Girl Scouts Leadership Group:** Seventh and eighth grade girls are given the opportunity to meet weekly to engage in activities that are STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) related. The main objective of this group is to encourage girls to pursue a career in the math/science fields.
- **Grief/Trauma Group:** Seventh grade students qualify based on a screener that identifies high levels of trauma/grief. They meet weekly with therapists in a group setting to share their personal experiences to learn coping skills to use in and out of school. Students learn that they are not alone in their feelings.

Teaching

Since the 2009-10 school year, George Read has gone through a number of changes in academic programs, emphasis on lesson planning, and school climate. These changes have all led to increases in test scores over a very short period of time. The state also underwent a change in the testing system they used during this time period. Delaware went from a traditional paper and pencil test to an online computer-based test for the 2010-11 school year. In 6th grade ELA and math as a whole school we showed the biggest increases in the percentage of students meeting the standard. Instructional planning, an emphasis on relationships, and the sharing of data with students were main contributors to this increase.

Although there are many factors that have contributed to the rise in test scores over a one-year period, the collaboration amongst teachers in 6th grade, with a renewed focus on planning, was one of the most significant. Many hours were spent prioritizing, organizing, and sequencing learning during the summer, which helped the teachers focus on data and modifications to lessons during the school year. The development of a common language also focused the teachers in their conversations during meetings and discussions about student work. This approach to teaching and learning was in its second year of implementation during the 2011-12 school year. The comfort level of planning, the use of graphic organizers, summarization strategies, and a stronger emphasis on writing all were paramount in the 11% increase in reading state assessment scores: 57.9% in 2011 to 69% in 2012. Another reason for the increase

in scores was teacher ability to access fall test scores, which was new with the computerized test, and to share the information with the students. It allowed teachers a talking point in discussions with students and enabled goals to be set with the students. As a direct impact, relationships with students improved because of the positive conversations about data and achievement. The by-product of these relationships were students caring more about their work and working harder for the teacher, school, and themselves.

As a school, there was a nearly 20% increase in the math state assessment scores from the spring of 2011 (47.8% proficient) to the spring of 2012 (67.4% proficient). Much of this increase can be attributed to collaboration amongst teachers to create relevancy within the curriculum. It was found that many of the examples from the mathematics curriculum missed connections with the students and therefore needed to be improved. Finding ways to show students the importance of the math they were learning created an atmosphere where students felt as if they were doing meaningful work. For example, seventh grade students began the integers unit by discussing time zones in connection with the Summer Olympic Games. The students had to determine why many of the events were not televised live for the people of the United States to watch. It was also noticed that students lacked the motivation to show work and therefore used a lot of guessing strategies to solve problems. The teachers required students to work through problems with a systematic approach, using a number of different strategies to find a solution. This was often done in collaboration with other students and shared through the use of graphic organizers and summarizing strategies. The math teachers, like the English teachers, also worked with the students to set targets and goals based on their fall test scores. Personal conferences, targeted interventions, and extra help for identified students helped the school address particular populations of students who needed practice with certain concepts. These interventions occurred during daily enrichment time as well as after school.

George Read showed overall growth in all grade levels in both reading and math. In preparation for the next generation of state assessments, staff members have been focusing on a few main strategies. These strategies include data analysis, professional conversations, and an increased focus on literacy. Fully implementing the Common Core curriculum is a focus to ensure that students and teachers are ready for the next round of challenges. This year, the teachers have also started reviewing Smarter Balanced sample questions and performance tasks to use as models in the classroom. It is our belief that we have set up a positive atmosphere and have a formula of team building and collaboration that will enable us to take on these challenges and continue to show growth and success.

Organizational Leadership

The staff and students at George Read all have an active role in keeping the mission and vision of the school alive at all times. Our school motto, which represents the culture of the school, is OLE: Where Ownership Leads to Excellence. It is our expectation that every student knows and exemplifies the mission and vision both in and out of school. As the leadership team makes decisions, they also keep it in mind as we value ownership. Each day the students recite the

motto with Ms. Sage on the daily announcements. In addition, throughout the day students are reminded of the motto through interactions. For example, when a student does not complete an assignment, he/she is assigned working lunch. When the teacher gives the assignment, the student is reminded that we expect all students to be leaders in and out of the building by striving for personal excellence. Each week, OLE awards are distributed to staff and students. The names are read aloud on the announcements. Each recipient is given an award and can choose from various prizes. Lastly, staff and administrators discuss leadership roles when discussing decision-making and behavior with students.

Leadership is recognized at all levels at George Read. Administrators and teachers take an active role at implementing the School Success Plan. All activities align with the district goals and objectives. This year, the district has begun to roll out the Common Core State Standards in English and mathematics. Throughout the year, professional development opportunities were provided to the classroom teachers and the administration. For example, the building literacy coach presented to the department by following a standard from fifth grade to ninth grade to show the progression of expectations. The math teachers participated in an activity to unpack the algebra strand of the Math in Context series to find the connections between content and the standards. In addition, during the district meetings where curriculum and pacing are determined, CCSS are incorporated into all plans. In addition, teachers have attended professional development for Smarter Balanced. They have begun to incorporate the question formats into their classrooms and assessments. For example, the teachers have developed multiple-choice questions that are multi-step without “right there” answers. In addition, the teachers are developing performance tasks that require the application of multiple standards and practices.

Data has played an integral part in the improvement of George Read Middle School. At the teacher level, instructional decisions are made using student achievement data. Each week teachers are required to meet in a professional learning community for 45 minutes focusing exclusively on data. The teachers review DCAS scores, attendance reports, behavioral reports, formative classroom assessments, and districtwide common assessment results. Using the information, the teachers are able to determine individual student needs. Therefore, the teachers place students in appropriate intervention groups and plan lessons/activities to address the needs. In addition to teachers using data, the leadership team uses data to make buildingwide decisions. For example, the budget is spent based upon the goals in the school success plan. Reading and mathematics are the highest-need area; therefore, the majority of the budget is spent on supplies and materials for these two subjects. Data was also used to support the development of working lunch and Z day, which are distinct times for students to complete assignments or attend “fun” activities of their choosing based upon their academic standing. Students were not completing assignments, leading to low marking period grades and assessment scores. The leadership team then created a system to address task completion. In the past three years, the State of Delaware implemented a new teacher and evaluation program, the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS II). Each staff member in the building is evaluated in the following areas: planning and preparation, management, instruction/delivery, professional responsibilities, and student achievement. All non-tenured staff is evaluated three times per year with a summative appraisal. Tenured staff is evaluated

once per year with a summative at the conclusion of each two-year cycle. Staff members who have areas of need highlighted during the process can be placed on “expectations” or a formal improvement plan. The expectations step in the process provides teachers with additional support/resources to grow and improve in their teaching practice.

At George Read, everyone is responsible for student growth and achievement. Support through professional development, teacher collaboration, and a continuous feedback loop gives our teachers and students the best opportunities to succeed.

Instructional Leadership

In order to incorporate the CCSS into instruction, the teachers have participated in various professional development activities centered on both the Common Core Standards and Smarter Balanced Assessments. It is imperative that the teachers understand how each standard will be assessed as the assessment dictates how to interpret and teach each standard. This year, the teachers have started making changes to their assessments to allow students the opportunity to complete complex tasks, even when answering multiple-choice questions. Rather than using “right there” answers, students are required to complete multiple steps to get to the correct solution.

In the last ten years, George Read Middle School has not met AYP multiple times; therefore, it was inherent that we change (and quickly). The teachers and students are now seeing academic success. Much of the success can be attributed to the change in attitude within the building. We have built an all-inclusive climate program to encourage students to want to come to school. In addition, the teachers have incorporated strategies to engage students in learning. Rather than sitting idly in class being “taught at,” it is expected that students are active participants. For example, the students complete hands-on projects and labs. Rather than being taught a straight mathematical algorithm, students use an investigative approach to develop the algorithm. The teachers are also incorporating high-impact strategies into every lesson. Graphic organizers, summarizing activities, and extended-meaning tasks can be seen throughout the building. In addition, instructional time is held sacred. Instructional time is interrupted only when absolutely necessary.

Districtwide professional development is held on an on-going basis. One faction of the meetings focuses exclusively on writing outlines of units that tie the standards to the curriculum and activities. Teachers who attend use professional learning community time to review the outlines with all teachers and make connections between grade levels, topics, and skills. Therefore, the activities used in the classroom are designed for maximum impact.

Based upon the Brockton High School model, GR implemented a literacy committee to address the need of literacy across the content areas. The committee was tasked with researching high-impact literacy strategies that would be used in all content areas. The committee then created and delivered professional development to teachers in their department. Expectations were set. The first strategy implemented was two-column notes with summarizing. For two marking

periods, every teacher in the building was required to complete three activities using this strategy. By the end of the second marking period, student summaries had improved, and it translated to high scores on reading assessments. The students were utilizing the strategy on the end of the year DCAS testing.

Professional development at GR was preplanned for the teaching staff as a whole. The workshops planned were based on our school success plan and the needs of the students/staff. For the last three years, the two main foci were implementing high-impact instructional strategies and school climate. Many areas of focus were addressed from presentations at the Models School Conferences. For example, we implemented the literacy committee (Brockton High, Sharon Wolder), special education strategies (Liz Kuzmich), positive school climate (Pocomoke Middle, Caroline Bloxom), and rigor/relevance/relationships (Linda Jordon, *et al.*). We were able to take pieces from each presentation and adapt it to fit our needs. Using these strategies, we have seen academic success and a positive impact on the climate.

Parent/Community

During the last four years, the administration and staff of George Read have implemented changes to increase parental involvement in the school. For example, days are set aside by the district for parent conferences. In the past, conferences were scheduled by teachers with a note sent home to the parent. Using this system, fewer than half of the parents actually attended the conferences. This year, we sent invitations home with every student. Parents requested conferences and chose a time that was convenient. We had a 94% attendance rate at the conferences this year. In addition, we scheduled additional conferences into the next month. Throughout the school year, staff offer academic nights for parents to come with their students and complete activities. At the math night, parents were taught five of the top strategies used in the math curriculum. The students were the “experts” for their parents. We also offer Title I nights to assist parents with understanding the support that we offer for their students’ academic success. In addition, we offered nights to demonstrate how to use Compass Learning, a computer-based program, for math and reading.

Effective and Efficient Best Practices

George Read has implemented a policy that will not allow students to earn a zero on any assignment. Through the use of this policy, teachers have been given the assurance that students will be held accountable for completing classroom assignments, projects, and assessments. Students are made aware of the consequences for disruption during class time, refusal to attempt a task, or not completing a reasonable assignment. All stakeholders are expected to use one of the following programs to ensure that students complete tasks.

The first program is called “working lunch.” In this program, students are given the opportunity, during their lunchtime, to complete assignments not finished in class. In a designated area, with a certified staff member, students work to finish these assignments. The students are expected

to eat lunch while working quietly on their individual assignments. This time is to be used for daily assignments to be completed. It is not used for assessments or project completion. A student will attend working lunch until the assignment is complete, which could be one lunch period or five. Students who are constantly sent to working lunch may incur additional consequences if classroom behavior is not corrected.

The second program implemented is Z-day. Each day a 30-minute period is available for students to get enrichment or intervention in core subject areas. Each Wednesday, the enrichment period is used in a different manner to allow teachers time to work with students to complete assignments, finish assessments, or work on projects. The Z-day also acts as a reward period for those students who have completed all tasks during the three-day cycle. Students, who are up to date with assignments and are earning a “C” average, are given choices of fun activities such as:

- Basketball
- Computer time
- Games in the cafeteria
- Karaoke
- Art projects room
- X-box competitions

In order for this program to work, we had to get “buy-in” from the entire staff. The exploratory teachers are the backbone of the program, as they not only teach one exploratory per grade, but they also have a Z-day group for each grade. Each Tuesday, the teachers on each team come together to decide which students must stay behind the next day. The team leaders then communicate this information with the exploratory staff and the administrators. Should a student need to complete assignments in multiple classes, the teachers create an individual schedule for that student.

These programs have proven to be effective in motivating students to persevere through classroom assignments. Therefore, marking period grades and state assessment scores have risen in the past two years. Students are now held accountable for their assignments and grades. Because time is already built into each day, it was logistically easy to create the Z-day. The activities that the other students participate in have low to no cost; therefore, the teachers and the students do feel as though they are getting their bang for their buck.

In order to implement this program, the cost has been minimal over the past two years. Less than \$200.00 has been spent on supplies for the “fun” alternative activities. Creative measures have been used to decrease costs. For example, a teacher donated the gaming system for the Madden Football competition. In addition, the students provide the actual game disks each day. The students get the words to the songs for karaoke through free websites, with lyrics projected onto the Smart Board. Also, many of the activities offered have no cost since the materials are in the building (open gym, free computer time, *etc.*). The limited funds that have been spent were for art projects such as pumpkins, snowflakes, and flowers. While monetary costs have been kept to a minimum, the biggest cost has been in staff usage. For example, all guidance

counselors do two lunch duties daily to ensure coverage at working lunch. It was necessary to get staff buy-in to make this program a success.

George Read staff and students are committed to academic excellence. An all-inclusive school culture, strong teacher-student relationships, and high expectations will continue to move this school to new levels.