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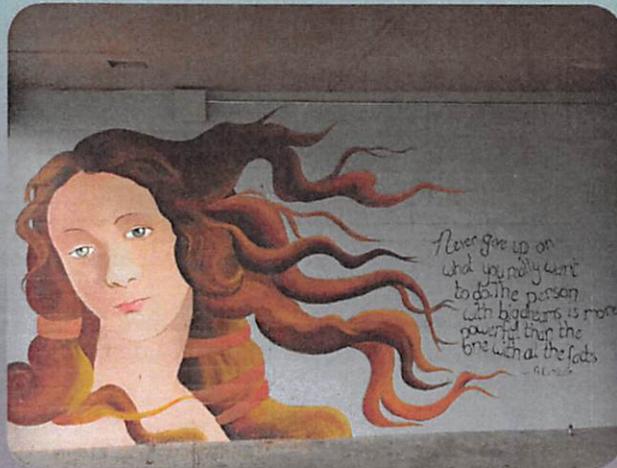# Oregon Quality Education Commission
College Readiness Case Study Project

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epic
educational policy improvement center
empowering students for college and career

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) conducted a case study analysis during the 2015–16 school year of four Oregon high schools (Crater Renaissance Academy, Jordan Valley High School, Sheridan High School, Jefferson Middle College) located in differing geographical locations. The purpose of the study was to identify and find support for factors that contribute to successful schools, leading to positive college and career readiness outcomes for students. We used the EPIC School Success Model as an organizing framework to examine the extent to which academic, programmatic, social, and other factors were aligned with a core set of values, beliefs, theoretical frameworks, attitudes, and vision. Complete findings are described in later sections, but a few key findings are highlighted here:

- The schools shared a number of common elements. They all were able to activate and leverage social capital in service of the students. In this context social capital refers internally to the degree to which adults in the school building are able to collaborate across classrooms, departments, and services. Some examples include professional learning communities, professional development, and school care teams. Externally, social capital refers to the degree to which the school partners with outside agencies in order to serve the academic, social, and cultural needs of the school. Examples include postsecondary institutions and social service providers.

- Schools in the study also demonstrated an ability to use data to make sense of student achievement and strategize for future efforts based on a commitment to the values and beliefs that they espouse. Examples include the decision process to adopt AVID, staffing choices, and school data teams.

- Schools in the study shared an approach to program design that includes weighing costs and benefits around aspects of school structure, which includes the importance of local and cultural relevance.

- In each of the schools there was a profound connection between students and teachers. Students felt known by their teachers and supported to reach their postsecondary goals.

The complexity of the individual cases is explored in greater detail in the report. The individual attributes and voices of each school are explored and analyzed. We then provide a cross-case analysis of common themes from the schools.

INTRODUCTION

The Oregon 40-40-20 goal, heralded by the adoption of Senate Bill 253 in 2011, seeks to better prepare young learners in Oregon for the growing demands of the 21st-century workforce. To this end, it is commonly understood that schools need to be doing a better job at preparing today's youth to exit high school and obtain postsecondary training and/or education. The Quality Education Commission (QEC) has been working to seek out and better understand the best practices, and the associated contextual factors, used by Oregon high schools to improve graduation rates and promote greater engagement in postsecondary education among Oregon's high school students.

The purpose of this study, undertaken by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) under contract to the QEC, is to look closely at factors beyond academic achievement alone with regard to what constitutes a successful school. Additionally, this study examines how situational context may have an effect on how schools function, considering factors such as geographic location and connection to the community. The guiding questions that this research was designed to unpack and address are the following:

- What factors contribute to a school's success in achieving positive and equitable student college and career readiness outcomes?

- Do successful schools in varying geographic locales employ similar or different strategies to achieve their success?

This study employed a mixed-method design wherein schools were selected from a list compiled by ECONorthwest via a rigorous quantitative analysis of college-going rates and factors that might influence those rates (e.g., geographic locale, demographics). Schools were ranked within each geographic category by the size of the effect of the school itself in influencing college-going rates. The invited schools were asked to participate in a case study. A case study approach was employed because the examination of quantitative data alone does not explain the unique and powerful interplay and contributions of students, teachers, staff, and community to the functioning of a school. A qualitative perspective allows for a rich and deep description of the combination of interactions that occur within a "successful" school organizational system.
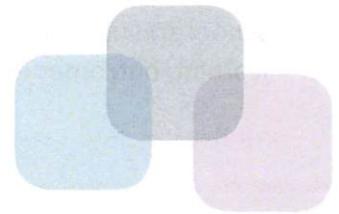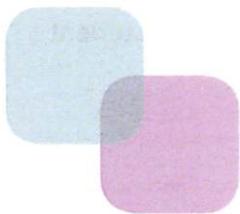
SCHOOL SUCCESS MODEL

Schools are inherently complicated organizational systems. The challenge of aligning programs, curriculum, grade levels, and funding choices to adequately meet the needs of students, teachers, staff, communities, and families is often an overwhelming task. In such an environment, efficiency and simplicity often take precedence. For the participants, school days are built on hundreds of micro- and macro-level decisions, some of which can have profound impacts and consequences that cannot always be anticipated. Making sense of the data collected in this report required researchers to organize the data along some sort of heuristic that can provide coherent assertions and potential lessons for other schools.

The School Success Model (SSM) is a multileveled, diagnostic framework designed by Dr. Matt Coleman, EPIC's Executive Director and Chief Academic Officer, as a tool that schools can use to organize, align, reflect on, and plan their efforts. The four levels of the SSM (see Figure 1) represent a sense-making progression that begins from a foundation of the beliefs, values, attitudes, vision, and theoretical frameworks that guide the strategic directions of the school. The SSM asserts that this foundational level helps schools to uncover and make explicit the cultural identity of the school. Continuing up the model allows schools to answer the questions of how their structures align with their values, beliefs, etc., how learning happens in the school, and how the school prepares all students for life after high school.
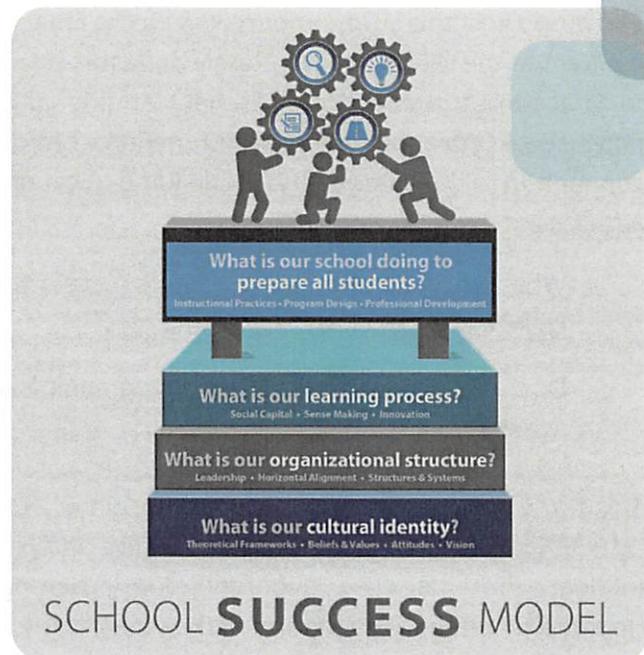
Figure 1. Structure of the School Success Model

The analysis in this case study uses the SSM as a guiding framework. During the site visits, we first attempted to uncover the beliefs, values, and vision that influenced the strategic direction of the school. Based on many prior studies of successful schools, we believed there would be clear indications of a shared vision that could be made explicit by multiple stakeholders in the school. Beliefs, values, and theoretical frameworks could then be traced up through the structures of the school and ultimately be made visible in the instructional practices, program design, and student learning outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Definitions for Key Elements at Each Level of the School Success Model

Key Elements of the School Success Model				
Level 4	**Instructional Practices** refer to what is taught, how it is taught, and how the community assesses what students are learning. Instructional practices must be rooted in pedagogy that is culturally relevant and responsive with the recognition that culture is multidimensional and changes over time.	**Professional Development** is the continuous process of building educator capacity. Professional development should be designed to ensure teachers' actions and student learning align with the school's cultural identity.	**Program Design** includes the design of student learning experiences. This can consist of the curriculum, pedagogical approach for how learning takes place, and when and where learning takes place.	
Level 3	**Social Capital** involves people working together, thinking together, learning from each other, and becoming "collectively committed to improvement." (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012)	**Sense Making** is the process of evaluating data, knowledge, and experience using analytical and logical reasoning. Information from multiple perspectives and multiple measures is gathered, disaggregated, reviewed, and analyzed to influence decisions, develop action plans, and guide future action.	**Innovation** is a multistage process in which a new idea that solves an important problem is developed, adopted, and enacted within an organization. Innovation requires taking risk and embracing failure, launching small tests and iterations to develop a solution that works.	
Level 2	**Leadership** entails "taking responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty." The responsibility of the leadership team is to develop a shared capacity for visioning, sense making, relating, and inventing. (Curtis & City, 2009)	**Structures & Systems** include the infrastructure, communications, roles, role relationships, procedures, methods, and routines that support the operations of a school. Successful structures and systems are well aligned with each other and in accordance with the organizational culture and identity.	**Horizontal & Vertical Alignment** is the linking of a school's values, beliefs, theoretical frameworks, and vision with the operations of the school. Horizontal and vertical alignment refers to the relationship among all of the systems and structures of the school.	

Level 1	**Theoretical Frameworks** are the mental models or lenses that frame how people think, act, and make decisions in a specific context.	**Beliefs** are assumptions and convictions that people hold to be true about themselves and the world around them. Often, values inform the beliefs people hold.	**Values** are the ideals, concepts, or principles that guide people and are integrated into the fabric of an organization. In the context of schools, the values and corresponding beliefs we hold around students and how learning occurs strongly influence how the organization is structured.	**Attitudes** refer to the general "feel" of the organization as a collective. They are manifested in interactions between people and are influenced by the specific context, experience, systems of power and privilege, leadership style, etc.	**Vision** is what we want to become true. A vision should serve as a clear guide or north star for current and future courses of action.

METHODS

This section provides details about school selection procedures, data collection instruments and processes, and our analytic framework.

School Selection

Case study schools were selected from a list of high-performing schools developed by ECONorthwest for the matched pairs study funded by QEC in 2014–15 (Andrew Dyke, ECONorthwest, memo to Brian Reeder, March 11, 2014). This list identified schools that appeared to have the strongest effects on college-going rates given different sets of demographics. Specifically, the variables included in the analysis that resulted in the ordered ranking of schools within each of four geographic categories (i.e., urban, suburban, town, rural) were the following:

- Enrollment
- Percentage of students with Limited English Proficient (LEP) status
- Percentage of students from economically disadvantaged households
- Percentage of students who are non-White
- Percentage of students who identify as Hispanic

EPIC compiled background information, including major programs and unique circumstances, from about 20 schools: the five schools in each geographic category with the largest effect sizes on college-going rates. The QEC members then determined the order of prioritization for an invitation to participate: the school within each geographic category with the highest effect size would be invited to participate and if the superintendent or principal of that school declined to participate, the school with the second largest effect size would be invited, and so on through the list of the five within each category. In three of the four geographic categories, the school with the largest effect size agreed to participate after being invited by the QEC. In one category, the school with the third largest effect size agreed to participate.

Data Collection Methods

Student focus groups. To gain a deeper understanding of student attitudes and perceptions, focus groups were held with students at the four case study schools. Student focus group participants were selected by the school principals to provide equitable representation, to the best of their ability, aligned with the school demographics. EPIC evaluation team members developed a focus group protocol designed to gather student perceptions around individual and school factors associated with positive and equitable college and career readiness outcomes.
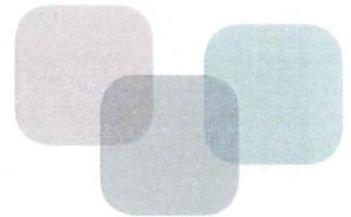
The following numbers of students participated in focus groups:
- Crater Renaissance: 41 students, Grades 9–12
- Sheridan: 32 students, Grades 9–12
- Jordan Valley: 16 students, Grades 10–12
- Jefferson: 26 students, Grades 9–12

School staff and administrator focus groups/interviews. To gain a deeper understanding of staff attitudes and perceptions at each school, focus groups/interviews were held with key staff and administration members. Focus group/interview participants were selected through consultation with school principals to obtain access to school staff members who were key to college and career readiness at the school, as well as to include staff who could best address the guiding questions of this project. EPIC researchers developed a focus group protocol designed to gather attitudes and perceptions from key school staff around individual and school-level factors associated with positive and equitable college and career readiness outcomes for students.

The following numbers of staff members participated in focus groups or interviews:
- Crater Renaissance: 7 teachers, 5 administrators/counselors/other
- Jordan Valley: 3 teachers, 1 administrator/counselor/other
- Sheridan: 2 teachers, 3 administrators/counselors/other
- Jefferson: 2 teachers, 6 administrators/counselors/other

All student and school staff/administrator focus groups and interviews were held during the two-day site visits at each school and were conducted by EPIC team members. Focus group sessions were audio recorded. Participants were provided informed consent information sheets and they provided written and/or oral consent to participate and be recorded. Passive (Jordan Valley, Crater Renaissance, Sheridan) and active (Jefferson) consent forms were also obtained from parent/guardians of student participants. Audio recordings were transcribed, and responses were then organized and thematically analyzed using NVivo qualitative research software. Once themes were identified, data were summarized by category.

Teacher survey. EPIC administered a survey to teachers at each case study school to gather data on educator attitudes and perceptions around the factors associated with a successful school organizational system. The survey was administered using an online format and was designed to be completed in approximately 20–25 minutes. A link to the survey was provided to the principal at each school and thus distributed to the teachers by their administrator for completion. The majority of questions were closed-ended, using a variety of response scales, depending on the survey subsection. Three open-ended items were also included, as well as three demographic questions. The teacher survey included items relating to the following constructs: Schoolwide and Individual

Teacher Efficacy (34 items), Leadership (18 items), School Goal Structure (13 items), College/Career Readiness Culture (6 items), Equity Perceptions (19 items), and Demographics (3 items).

All teachers at the participating schools included in this study were invited to participate. Participation was voluntary and respondents were assured that their participation would not be associated with evaluation and that their responses would remain confidential, to be used only for research purposes. Open-ended data were analyzed and summarized thematically. Closed-ended items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The number of completed surveys and response rates for each school are as follows:

- Crater Renaissance: 24 responses, 100%
- Jordan Valley: 2 responses, 50%
- Sheridan: 14 responses, 100%
- Jefferson: 34 responses, 82%
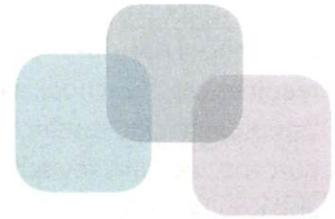
School observations. EPIC researchers conducted school walk-throughs along with classroom observations during each two-day site visit. The purpose of the walk-throughs was to look for artifacts that may be indicative of elements of the school culture that support college and career readiness, academic press, multiple rigorous pathways, tone of the school environment, and other factors that generated questions and discussions within a certain case study site. The walk-throughs throughout the school buildings also allowed researchers to note general student and teacher comportment within the school. Classroom observations at each school were arranged through cooperation with the principal and teachers, allowing researchers to attend a sample of classrooms across the grade levels and content areas during the course of the two-day site visits. Classroom observations usually involved short 10- to 15-minute informal observation sessions, enabling approximately 5–10 visits per school. The classroom visits allowed researchers to observe levels of student engagement and teacher-student interaction within the classroom.

School documents/artifacts. EPIC staff requested and conducted a review of relevant documents and records from each case study site. Requested records and documents related to the research questions were used to set the school success context for each case study and to clarify or elaborate on the interview and focus group data. Below are the types of documents received from each site:

- Crater Renaissance: Website (includes Teacher Toolbox link to resources on shared instructional strategies for teachers), mission/vision statement, personal education plan for students, CES principles, school improvement plan, proficiency grading documents, restorative justice/bullying prevention documents, samples of school newsletters

- Jordan Valley: Website (includes link to resources for dual credit program/advising at Treasure Valley Community College), daily schedule

- Sheridan: Website, student handbook, professional development schedule, new teacher mentoring program, sample of school newsletter

- Jefferson: Website, student handbook, school four-year plan, grade-level progression plan documents, course guide, Portland Community College documents, Self Enhancement Inc. document, student staffing protocol

State data. EPIC researchers requested and reviewed five years of school data from ODE on metrics that are able to be shared with third parties, such as those contained within the school report cards. These data are summarized in the Appendix. Additionally, the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey data were reviewed for case study schools where the data were available at the school level (Crater Renaissance and Sheridan). Data were used to provide context for each individual school and to inform the overall understanding of how the schools function.

Analytic Framework

The EPIC School Success Model was used as a heuristic through which to view the functioning of each case study school. Through the use of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the analysis began by looking at the primary and secondary data sources from each individual school and identifying the components of the School Success Model that are comprised in Level 1, which include values, beliefs, attitudes, and theoretical frameworks. The next step of the analysis was to examine the patterns in the data that outlined the "through lines," pathways that illustrate how the Level 1 components inform the development of schoolwide structures and processes that are found in the higher levels of the model. For each case study school, researchers made a decision to highlight those key structures and processes that emerged from the data to provide support for the research questions guiding this inquiry project. Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted to determine how themes found to be common across schools played out differently in each case, in part due to the complexity of factors that contribute to how schools operate and function. Throughout the process of analysis, data sources were compared to provide triangulation on the common themes and were used in the report to provide support for the findings.

CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

The four participating schools in the case study project represent four different geographical categories, as determined by NCES locale codes: Suburb, rural, town, and city:

- Suburb: Crater Renaissance Academy, Central Point, Oregon
- Rural: Jordan Valley High School, Jordan Valley, Oregon
- Town: Sheridan High School, Sheridan, Oregon
- City: Jefferson High School, Portland, Oregon

This section of the report contains an individual portrait of each school. In keeping with the purpose of this study, unique factors that were identified as contributing to a school's success in achieving positive and equitable college and career readiness outcomes for its students are presented and examined.

See Table 2 for an overview of the demographics of the four schools.

Table 2. Case Study School Selection Variables, 2014–2015

School	Total enrollment	Students with Limited English Proficient status (%)	Students from economically disadvantaged households (%)	Students who are non-White (%)	Students who identify as Hispanic (%)	Minimum distance to OUS* or CCWD** (miles)
Crater Renaissance Academy	427	8	64	23	15	18
Jordan Valley High School	48	***	52	8	8	47
Sheridan High School	244	8	58	25	14	12
Jefferson High School	475	13	****	81	13	2

   * = Oregon University System campus.
  ** = Community College/Workforce Development campus.
 *** = Data suppressed to protect student confidentiality.
**** = In 2014–15, offered lunch at no charge to all students (77% in 2013–14).

CRATER RENAISSANCE ACADEMY

Central Point, Oregon (pop. 17,600; 2013 data), sits just to the north of Medford, Oregon. In fact, those traveling south probably would not be able to tell when they passed from Central Point to Medford if not for signs informing them. The city lies along the I-5 corridor that bisects the valleys of western Oregon. The Medford region is a gateway to the Rogue River Valley to the west and the Cascade Mountains (including Crater Lake National Park) to the east. The interstate provides a physical metaphor for the dichotomies in Southern Oregon. Central Point has the highest income per capita in the area of Southern Oregon, which is contrasted by high poverty and unemployment rates, yet 64% of Crater Renaissance students are deemed economically disadvantaged by the

Crater Renaissance Academy 2014–15
Enrollment: 427
Graduation Rate: 72.83%
9th-Graders on Track: 71.6%
Students Taking SAT: 36.5%

state. Politically conservative (the zip code is the most conservative in Oregon), the city is juxtaposed against liberal-leaning Ashland, which is 17 miles to the south and home to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Against this backdrop, Crater Renaissance Academy, a Gates Small School, is carving out a vibrant niche.

In 2005, a group of longtime local educators and community leaders came together with the goal of writing a small schools grant and establishing focused academies to better serve the area students. Crater High School community members had always prided themselves as having a school whose staff knew the students well, that welcomed everyone, and that turned out nice kids. An activity at a faculty meeting caught them by surprise: out of a student body of approximately 1,500, every 15th student's name was printed out. Names were posted around the room at the meeting, and teachers were asked to place sticky notes next to students' names, using a yellow note if the student and their family were known very well, and a white note if the student was known well enough to greet in the hallway. At the end of the activity, there were 12–15 student names with only a white note and a few students with no notes at all. This visual representation of connections to the students served as a clarion call to the school staff. The educators wanted to build a school where relationships were important and where every student would be seen and known. Additionally, they felt that achieving successful outcomes would require them to build a school where students could find something to be passionate about, to ignite their interests and keep them engaged in school. A design team assembled to imagine and develop four small schools.

Community outreach discussions were held around Central Point with parents and families about what the small schools model would look like and how it would benefit the students. Although it was difficult at first, the educators not only secured from all their stakeholders the support and trust

they needed to pursue the project, but they also wrote and obtained the grant, laying the groundwork for an alternative approach to high school in the region.

Out of this process ultimately arose three academies within Crater High School. One of the academies is Crater Renaissance Academy (CRA), with 427 students. This school's staff made the decision to adopt the philosophies of the Coalition for Essential Schools (CES). CES is a national network of schools dedicated to 10 principles that form the foundation of the educational approach: learning to use one's mind well, less is more, depth over coverage, goals apply to all students, personalization, student as worker, teacher as coach, demonstration of mastery, a tone of decency and trust, commitment to the entire school, resources dedicated to teaching and learning, and democracy and equity (for full descriptions see www.essentialschools.org). The 10 principles drive the content of the small learning communities that structure the school's curriculum. They are physically apparent on posters in the classrooms and many of the principles pepper the discussions with students, teachers, and administrators.

The emphasis on the arts and sciences is reflected on the walls of the school and in their new performing arts center across the campus. Student artwork and murals line the hallways, adding interest and splashes of color alongside the lockers and display cases. Each teacher's door is decorated with an image and quotation that speaks to an aspect of their personality and/or teaching philosophy. Students created an intricate mosaic of the CRA logo (the spiral that represents the Fibonacci sequence) on the outside of the building. It is a fitting metaphor as CRA has managed to find the golden ratio of pride, expectations, environment, and engagement.

> I feel like all the students and the teachers and the administrators all work really hard together to make a community with everyone and make sure . . . no one gets left behind and everyone's really pushing through together and accepting each other and loving each other. (Student focus group)

> One of the things that I really love about this school is that last year we had . . . a campaign that student government put together, Student Congress, called Engage and basically it was about teachers and students not letting anyone fall through the cracks. Everyone was going to engage and everyone was going to push forward and even if you stumbled at the finish line, you're going to make it to the finish line and the teachers are going to make sure that you get there. (Student focus group)

The following sections will explore the collective vision of CRA; the leadership structures, including how power and sense making are distributed across all members of the school community; and how the structures of the school encourage and rely on deep discussions of equity, justice, and community.

COLLECTIVE VISION

The Coalition of Essential School's 10 common principles form the foundation of CRA. Students are taught and exposed to the principles in a variety of ways, including the student handbook. As one teacher explains the vision at CRA, "My quick answer to you is if it doesn't fit into the 10 principles, we don't do it. That's what we built our school on." Each year, CRA focuses on one of the principles, using a variety of teacher- and student-led activities throughout the year. In the 2015–16 school year, the campaign focused on the principle of "Using your mind well."

> One of the things that I think that you can't forget and is crucial to our development as a school is the professional development that we have had for our teachers.... For the first 8 years ... we went to CES National Conferences both during the summer and in the fall and took as many teachers as we could afford to take. Usually that was 12 or 13. We get to visit great schools. We get to talk to great educators, great thinkers, people who are passionate about what they do. It changes everything. There's no more being that cynical teacher sitting in the staff room saying that doesn't exist. They can use this toolbox of tricks and protocols that we have implemented as a school. That's what really on the ground has worked. (Conversation with Principal King)

The focus on using one's mind well was a continuous theme during the visit. It was spoken and repeated by the students and the adults in the school and many referred to instances of its application in classrooms.

> Yesterday we had an assembly talking about using your mind well, which is our Habit of Mind for this year. And we had a conversation in Mr. Reynolds's class yesterday and it was about using your mind well and what does that actually mean, and how much of your thinking is actually **your** thinking? And he asked all these questions that get you deeper into the topic, and that really just ... makes me think about life and ... how much **your** thinking is actually your thinking? Where does it come from? (Student focus group)

> Student: That certain class, it's structured for essays and research topics, which is where we can demonstrate our own personal taste and our own way of expressing ourselves, are always—I won't necessarily say vague but they're very broad—they give you a lot of opportunities to really dig in to specifics that you are interested in. My sophomore year, we were studying Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. So a really broad section, but we spent a couple weeks in each one, but then we wrote a research paper, we had a problem or issue and we needed to write on that. That was our starting point, and then what that problem or issue might be we got to decide on, whether it was past or present. So there are people writing about the effects of the bombing of Hiroshima, how it affected Japanese culture after the fact. I did mine on the Rwandan genocide. It really helped to express [the] thing I love about this school, is the depth that people go into their subjects, and having that freedom to really go in-depth makes people want to love and really just go for whatever it is they're working on. It turns something that terrified me as sophomore, like a seven- or eight-page research paper, into something that was a complete breeze; I had no problems completing that paper because I loved what I was studying. And I think that's something I've really enjoyed, that it gives this overarching theme and this really broad network and then helps us pinpoint a specific thing and really work at it. By promoting this idea of making yourself think better, using your mind well, is what we call it. So, not

just working on something, not just studying the basics but really going in depth, getting every last little detail you can from anything you can study, just extracting it, and chewing over it, and really making it your own.

Interviewer: Do you all have a similar experience?

Students (collective): Yes. (Student focus group)

For students, the focus on using one's mind well thus inspires both deep reflection on what they care about and a profound willingness to engage deeply in their learning. In this way students internalize the vision of the school and incorporate it into their learning.

LEADERSHIP

Strong and shared leadership is evident at CRA. On the teacher survey, 100% of teachers agreed/ strongly agreed that leaders at CRA support creativity, innovation, and appropriate risk taking in the service of meeting student needs. From the superintendent to new freshmen there are visible structures and processes used by the school and designed to build consensus toward collective action. There is a profound sense of responsibility for the care of the school, each stakeholder playing a role in the maintenance of its design. District Superintendent Samantha Steele expresses an understanding of the need to create the space for an innovative small school like CRA:

I think you go to the small schools' process and you receive . . . autonomy and then you say "I will protect that . . ." because I think when you have room for people to get together and they believe in something . . . it's going to work. And I really want to give people space to try things. (Conversation with Superintendent Steele)

As principal, Mr. King provides an overarching and unifying vision for the staff and students at CRA. He is able to model the behaviors he wants to see, providing passion and enthusiasm that is felt by teachers and students, but does so in a way that is supportive and participatory. He attributes much of the school's success to the consensus model used in the school's sense-making processes. During staff meetings, ideas are considered by building consensus. When a decision is made, the expectation is that all teachers will implement the practice in their classrooms.

That's been an important thing [the consensus model]. We use our consensus model for big things and one of them is instructional techniques. If somebody brings an instructional technique or model forward that people like, we end up saying, "Should we implement this schoolwide?" If we get to [where] everybody is saying yes, then it's my job to make sure everyone's using it. So we have this list found on our website, all of our teachers use it. (Conversation with Principal King)

Students are also deeply embedded in the leadership structures at CRA. The Student Congress functions as the voice of the students. All students are invited to participate, there are no elected positions, and students use a moderated discussion format that they implement and follow themselves. Student attendance at the meetings varies, but they usually have a strong core group of student leaders. Principal King and several teachers attend, but they do not lead or control the

discussion. This format allows students a place to broach and discuss topics important to them that will have an impact on the greater student body. They take on serious issues and generate workable solutions. Recent meetings have addressed subjects such as student hunger, drug use in schools, and how to recognize and respond to racial microaggressions. Outcomes of the work of the Student Congress have been the development of a school community food bank, where students can obtain food but do not have to be embarrassed to ask about it, and the production of an assembly about how to combat microaggressions at CRA.

> It's not just a hierarchy. They [CRA teachers and staff] ask us questions about a lot of stuff. They take our opinion on a lot of things. It's not just, "This is the way you do it. There's no other way to do it. I'm teaching you this and nothing else." They're open to new ideas and new ways to doing things and they encourage it. (Student focus group)

> There's no head of Student Congress. Even the teachers and principal who come and sit in to hear what we have to say, it won't be about them just dictating how are things going. It's about the students getting a chance to bring up topics that they feel need to be brought up. I remember when it was two years ago, we were reading over reports from our school about how many kids come in to school hungry, [about] drug use in school. And stuff that we all care about, because we want to make a safe and happy learning environment. One thing that I absolutely love about Student Congress is that we actually make things happen. We sometimes take on more than we can handle, sometimes we don't get as much done as we'd like, but the fact of the matter is that there is still this group of students who are pushing to try to change some things. (Student focus group)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development for teachers could just as easily be placed in the leadership section of this case study. Teachers develop and lead weekly sessions in which instructional practices are embedded in the themes of that week. At the time of the study, the staff was reading Paul Tough's book, *How Children Succeed*. They were expected to have read and be ready to discuss the first chapter. At the beginning of the meeting, facilitators placed quotations from the reading around the room. As teachers participated in a gallery walk of selected quotations, they were asked to generate two open-ended Socratic-style questions on a sticky note for use in the next activity. Then, the teachers set up the room for Socratic seminar triads, another instructional technique practiced in the staff professional development sessions and then shared across the classrooms at CRA. Facilitators posed essential questions based on the reading that were used to not only discuss the themes brought up in their shared reading, but also to practice the Habit of Mind around Proof – Evidence – Argumentation. The final 10 minutes of the meeting included space for reflection and writing, as teachers responded individually to the morning's activity in their reflective journals.

The consistent and systematic use of the same instructional techniques across classrooms at CRA is part of the set of agreements on which teachers come to consensus. Once consensus is reached, a description of the technique is placed in the Teacher Toolbox, a publicly available (http://www.district6.org/cra/staff-resources/resources/) clearinghouse of approaches that have been previously

agreed upon. Examples of the common strategies include schoolwide writing and reading systems (using the acronyms MEAL and MOWED, respectively); text marking; Cornell notes; and student-led conferences, where students present, share, and defend their work. The consensus approach to instructional practice means that students become accustomed to patterns of speech, expectations for participation, and analytical tools across classrooms. In effect, the practices are normalized and integrated into the school culture. The Socratic method and the moderated discussion of the staff meetings are similar to those used in Student Congress. They simply become part of "what we do here," which was a nearly constant refrain from students, teachers, and administrators. There is clarity of purpose driven by a common vision and shared both vertically and horizontally throughout the school. Data from the teacher survey indicate that teachers at CRA have a high degree of confidence not only in their own self-efficacy as teachers, but also in the competence of the teachers as a group.

One teacher sums up the philosophy behind how these common strategies are put to use at CRA: "So it's this culture of we're going to share here. And it's not that I'm going to be dispenser of knowledge, but we're in this together. And I think that manifests in different ways in people's classrooms, but to me that's what underlines those relationships."

ACADEMIC STRUCTURES

In order to build and capitalize on the development of close relationships between teachers and students, the academic day is structured to include three-period humanities blocks with the same teacher. According to teachers and students, the blocks become like families. As one teacher described the contribution of the blocks to student success on the teacher survey: "Close 'family'-like relationships within our small learning communities . . . foster the academic and emotional growth of our students." The modified block scheduling allows teachers to achieve the CES principle of depth over coverage. It prioritizes deep learning and exploration of subject matter. Students report liking the way that they are allowed to learn and personalize their learning ("like being pushed, but in a loving way") and that they are given a chance to defend their thinking, pushed to provide facts to support their thoughts.

> *There's a culture of engagement [in our classrooms]. So we are so purposeful . . . in our classrooms, especially looking around this table [at the other teachers in the focus group], really purposeful in building a strong classroom community that enables, engages, and expects students to participate.*

*So whether it's a conversation or whether it's a job talk or whether it's a small group, even reflective writing, that culture of engagement is built and is recycled back and continually, continually visited, demanded, expected, respected, celebrated all the time, not just the first week of school. That's the way [it is] in my classroom, very transparently in . . . fellow teachers' classrooms . . . then I can ask students not only do we not do **that** here, but let's do **this** here, and why. (Teacher focus group)*

CRA does not have school counselors, so the blocks also function as an advisory class. The advisory format includes a focus on college and career readiness discussions and activities, including the completion of Personal Education Plans that guide students through a five-year college-bound planning process (beginning in the sophomore year of high school and into the first two years of college). CRA has a variety of other options and activities that are used to help prepare students for careers and college. The school holds Financial Aid/FAFSA Support Nights for students and families. Advanced Placement classes are offered on site and online. Students have the option to participate in dual credit classes through Rogue Community College. Recently, CRA has adopted the use of the AVID program as well. Two programs that the principal and teachers feel function particularly well in speaking to the student experience of the college environment are Returning Alumni Talks and College Treks. Every year, CRA alumni who have gone on to college or careers come back to speak during assemblies and describe their experiences from a student's perspective. College Treks get students on to college campuses around the state, as well as allow time for tours of the cultural options in the city in which they are visiting. The money for the different college treks is raised through fundraisers and through the operations of the campus coffee cart, a program started a few years ago by a CRA teacher. Student volunteers are trained as baristas and are now able to run the cart independently, bringing in on average $300 per week that is allocated for college treks.

Our goal, and what we've seen and have been able to be proud of, is that you [students] may come from a variety of backgrounds, right? And maybe you have somebody helping you get to college, maybe you don't, so AVID might help you there. Maybe you have never been on a college campus, so college trek gets you to go, "Oh, I can do this" or "How cool, I can't wait to move." But it's looking at this large, incredibly diverse group of students and realizing that we may have goals for them, but what are their goals for themselves? So asking them to think outside the box and feel something different, feel what it feels like to be on a college campus, feel what it feels like to talk to somebody about college experiences. This week we are [having] alumni come back and we're doing college discussions on Thursday. Those kinds of experiences, though we may be blue in the face saying the same thing, when it comes from somebody that's cooler than we are, all of a sudden they're listening. So I think we are purposeful in getting those moments, those guest speakers attempting to connect somehow. Even though it might be the fourth year we've been saying it . . . finally in her [the guest speaker's] class they're listening. (Teacher focus group)

FOCUS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

During one of the focus groups students began talking about their projects and presentations in class. One was presenting on abortion, another on the Rwandan genocide and others researched food production and factory farms. It became abundantly clear that there was an intentional

focus on issues of justice across a number of sociocultural subjects. The discussion led to the following exchange:

> *Student: What's really interesting about it is, with my group choosing abortion, you have to make a slideshow that has information about it and then the class has to go and look up their own information of what it's about as well, and then they will come back and you'll be sitting in the front of the room with your group and then the whole class has to debate against you, even if they . . . [disagree] they still have to act like they oppose you by giving you like, "Well, this said this, so why? What you're saying is right." It works with controversial topics, too.*
>
> *Interviewer: A lot of schools are afraid to talk about—*
>
> *[silence]*
>
> *[giggling] [laughing] [disagreeing]*
>
> *Student: It's like a daily subject. It comes up all the time. How can we make this school more equitable? What's wrong and how can we make it better? We don't sweep it under the rug; we blatantly talk about gay kids in our community. We talk about racism in our community. And we accept those people in our community and we talk about it to make it better. (Student focus group)*
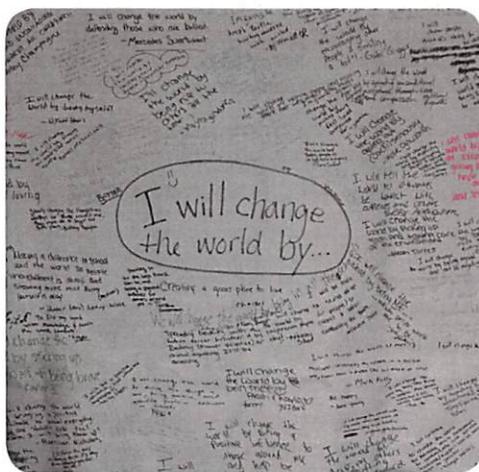
The mere suggestion that some schools shy away from controversial subjects was laughable to the students in the group. The emphasis on social justice is woven into the very curriculum at CRA. There is no specific social justice class that students take; instead, teachers use agreed-upon strategies and ways of broaching conversations and attending to important sociocultural topics, especially those that are relevant to the lives of the students at CRA. Strategies like the moderated discussion format are modeled and directly taught during students' freshman year and are developed and expanded upon systematically and consistently in the block classes and across the curriculum during sophomore, junior and senior years.

School assemblies tend to focus on hard conversations, so the ideas from the assemblies are brought immediately back to the classroom so the conversation can continue in a smaller discussion format and not left in isolation. Teachers report that they have to learn how to navigate the discussions as well, within their classrooms and with students and their families. They acknowledge that they make mistakes themselves, but they are all in agreement about the importance of a transformative justice pedagogy, citing the fact that topics like racism, sexism, and homophobia are a part of students' everyday lives.