

At Jefferson High School, the legacy of Linda Christensen and the Oregon Writing Project (OWP) has created an internal consistency among language arts teachers as they share a common approach, language, and set of expectations for what good writing looks like. This collaboration around a common approach to language instruction is then modeled through classroom posters and other physical artifacts around the school that create a culture within the school that can be expressed by teachers, students, administrators, and staff.

Jefferson Teacher: Almost all the English and social studies teachers are Oregon Writing Project coaches or are trained. That's a big through line because of the approaches. Yeah, we don't believe in the five-paragraph essay. . . . I mean, we have a different approach but we all have that social justice OWP approach training. That's a big through line in practice.

Interviewer: Yep. We just saw that in the Senior Inquiry class.

Jefferson Teacher: Mm-hmm (affirmative), so that's a through [line] where we coach them all up on that.

Interviewer: It's going to be a similar process every year?

Jefferson Teacher: Yeah, it's similar. . . . I mean making their work transparent and sharing out and that workshop-style of it where we don't need it polished. We're looking for the good things, we're trying to figure out what engineers your success . . . articulating the engineering of the success. We work on revisions and patterns of errors too, but the big focus is really I'm going to learn a move from you because I'm looking for what move worked in what you did and I want to remember that.

This interaction demonstrates how common language and a common approach across the school builds the school culture around writing. The writing workshop approach of the Oregon Writing Project allows students, whether they are in a Freshman Academy or Senior Inquiry, to experience a similar academic approach to writing. Students are then able to learn from and coach each other (sharing social capital) on their own. Collaboration is modeled and applied by all members of the school community.

Crater Renaissance Academy (CRA) is a clear example of how a belief in collaboration and a horizontal leadership structure combine to increase the social capital of teachers. Their open classrooms and internally organized professional development give teachers opportunities to observe and learn from each other. In one interaction, teachers discussed how they improve their practice. Experienced teachers serve as instructional coaches who help newer teachers process and plan for instructional improvement by taking "tours" of other classrooms where teachers are stronger in the targeted practices.

[The instructional coach] usually runs the tours and she'll take in groups. So, last year I was able to go on two or three. And on those I was very specific: "I'm looking for stronger openers to my class." And she took me to a teacher that has a strong opener. (New teacher focus group)

All these examples indicate how a core value of teacher collaboration allows teacher to leverage their social capital in ways that improve classroom practices.

Student engagement. Students play a key role in building a welcoming community in their school as well. In each of the schools, students talked about how safe they felt, how there was little to no bullying, and how school often felt like family. At Crater Renaissance Academy, students take an active role in creating an environment where bullying does not occur.

Student 1: I think it was a basketball game, one of the kids was saying racial slurs to this kid, and he was an exchange student from Africa. And because it was a public event, Mr. King [the principal] came to each classroom and he cried with us. It was really sad and he was like, "I can't believe that this happened to our school and we need to work better to not, this doesn't, this shouldn't be happening in our world" and . . . it was so emotional.

Student 2: So what happened with that was Student Congress met up and we talked about it and we decided to do the microaggression assembly, we decided to do the "not on our campus" program and we just, we told Mr. King, "Mr. King, you've got to talk about this." If Mr. King needs our advice, he's come to us as a student's congress and we'll say to him, "You need to talk to the students," and we need it also, we don't not talk about things like that. So we decided as the Student Congress to have an assembly and then we organized that for a month. They're really well thought-out. We go in, we have to have a purpose, we have to have an action plan. This is what we do to make change in our school. So we have a big assembly, we have keynote speakers, and we watch impactful things as an entire school.

Students at CRA are empowered through the Student Congress to take an active role in creating a welcoming environment. Solutions are cocreated, and everyone takes responsibility for their implementation. This example demonstrates that the collaboration that happens between students is strengthened by a system and structure that is part of the school. Leadership for solutions occurs both horizontally and vertically. All this is built on values of antiracism, collaboration, and mutual responsibility for the care of all students.

This theme was repeated at each of the other schools in the study:

Jordan Valley

Student 1: We're all friends.

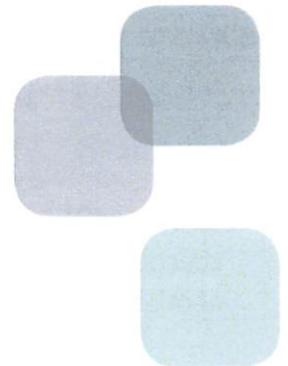
Student 2: There's no bullying type stuff that's going on in other schools.

Interviewer: Do you all agree with that?

Student 3: Yes, it's more of a community.

Sheridan

Student 1: Our school is great because we have a very safe environment in a very diverse school. We have a few great teachers in the school that push and inspire our students. We take bullying very seriously and have minimal bullying in our school.



Bonding social capital functions by creating norms that govern behavior in both explicit and implicit ways. Schools in the study use intentional and structured approaches (e.g., PLCs and Student Congress) to build collaboration among and between students, teachers, staff, and administrators.

Bridging Social Capital: School-in-Community

In a case study of social capital as a driver of urban school reform in Texas, Shirley (1997) stated,

Social capital theory suggests that if reformers seek to improve urban schools, they need to cultivate generalized reciprocity and social trust in such a manner that virtuous circles replace vicious ones. In addition . . . they must abandon purely internal reforms within the school and emphasize the many potential relationships that can be built (and rebuilt) between the school and its community. Those relationships must engage parents . . . but they should extend beyond those family members who are immediately concerned with children's learning to reach out to congregations, the business community and public officials. (p. 27, emphasis in the original)

The schools in this study all succeed in identifying and leveraging the assets of the community in service of the students and staff.

Bridges to families. At Jordan Valley, Sheridan, and Jefferson, the schools recognize that students enter the school with both the assets and the burdens of their lives outside of it. Students lead complex lives, which requires an acknowledgment that the learning process will have more success when that complexity is incorporated into the educational mission at the school. Jordan Valley students see a direct connection between their school and the community through the community's tireless support and championing of athletic and other extracurricular events. Sheridan's Principal Rech spoke of the need for collaboration with community partners from Yamhill County to provide necessary social services for students and families. This outreach included getting firewood for families with wood stoves during the winter months. At Jefferson, the school's partnership with Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI), a nonprofit agency that offers both educational programs and social services, provides students and families with wraparound services and support. Through SEI's partnership, the school can offer case management, rental and energy assistance, and access to mental health counseling.

Bridges to local businesses. The connection between Jordan Valley and the local community is nearly seamless. The school is in the community and the community is in the school. Local businesses share both the financial and social capital to meet their commitment to the education of the students at the school.

Bridges to institutions of higher education. Each of the schools in the study has close connections with local colleges and universities. Through their relationship with Willamette Promise, students at Sheridan are earning college credit at both Chemeketa Community College and Willamette University. Students in Jordan Valley do the same with Treasure Valley Community

College, which sends a liaison to the school regularly to provide academic and social support for the students. Many students at Crater Renaissance are coenrolled at Rogue Community College and Southern Oregon University, and many are earning college credits before they graduate high school.

Perhaps the most integrated partnership between a high school and its local postsecondary institutions is Jefferson. Portland Community College is located across the street from the high school. While there have been attempts in the past to partner, Jefferson's transition to a middle college required a deeply embedded partnership that provides dual credit opportunities at Jefferson and regular college classes at PCC. Both institutions have dedicated staff members who work collaboratively to support students as they transition from Jefferson to PCC. The success of the program and the support network that makes it possible allowed Jefferson to take on the ambitious goal of having every junior at the school enrolled in classes at PCC. Additionally, Jefferson instituted a Senior Inquiry class for every 12th-grade student who partners with Portland State University and provides students with credit for their participation.

SENSE MAKING

Sense making is defined in the School Success Model as 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. Sense making asks teams to "cultivate a habit of using evidence" in the context of the complexity of change in schools and communities (Curtis & City, 2009). Weick (2007) quotes a personal conversation with a wildlands firefighter who said, "If I make a decision it is a possession, I take pride in it, I tend to defend it and not listen to those who question it. If I make sense, then this is more dynamic and I listen, and I can change it. A decision is something you polish. Sense making is a direction for the next period."

Sense making relies on the critical foundations underneath it in the SSM. If a school does not have clear values, beliefs, and attitudes, if there is no coherent vision, and if there are no guiding theoretical frameworks, then the school may meander down educational pathways rather than stride purposefully forward. If there is no structure to the organization, if leadership is concentrated in a few hands, and if there are no structures and systems in place, the data from multiple sources may prove cumbersome and not provide a sense of clear purpose and direction.



The following sections explore the ways that the case study schools are using data in many forms in order to process information and proceed strategically with their choices. Although the examples provided across schools vary in their content and implementation, the key unifying element is the focus by school leaders and staff on deliberation of choice versus crisis of the moment.

The AVID Choice

The staff at both Jefferson High School and Crater Renaissance Academy (CRA) discussed the process they used to make sense of the role a program like AVID could play at their school. For CRA, as they looked at AVID they realized that they were already doing many of the things that AVID does. Their values, beliefs, and theoretical frameworks were in alignment. They believed that AVID provided more structure and cleaner materials that would be easier for students to understand and for teachers to get behind. Because of this alignment, it made sense to become an AVID school.

Speaker 1: AVID fell into our laps to start with. . . . [We] went to see a demonstration site and hear about it, and we then spent the next 48 hours talking about does this work for our school or not? We have enough on our plate, we don't need more. What we're doing, we're doing well and we'd like to do it much better. So we don't want to get our eye off the ball, you know, and get distracted by something else. But the more that . . . we talked about it, we realized that a lot of the AVID structures and expectations were things that we were already doing in our classes or asking our teachers to do in our classes and asking our students to do in our classes. And this felt like a way of refreshing us, reminding us and keeping us focused on what it is we're already doing.

Speaker 2: Increasing fidelity as well.

Speaker 1: And so, that's what it came down to. It's not something new, it's what we're already asking people to do, but it's an increase in fidelity and then it came down to bringing our teachers together at the PD. That also happened very, very quickly after that meeting. We said we're thinking about this, but we need to know if there's buy-in. And of the 15 people sitting at that table, there were 8–9 people who wanted to teach the class as I recall. (Teacher focus group)

For Jefferson, staff looked at AVID and also realized that they were already teaching many of the values, beliefs, and skill sets that AVID offers. However, AVID did not fit with Jefferson's value of all students getting equitable opportunities. They had recently committed to having all freshmen in academies, all juniors in dual credit and middle college classes, and all seniors taking Senior Inquiry. AVID did not match with the theoretical frameworks.

Our educational goal is to support students and [assist them to] achieve in college experiences, prior to graduating from high school. Every student that enters the door realizes that the expectation is that they will complete college coursework, prior to leaving, and that for them to receive what we call a middle college diploma they have to complete at least 12 credits prior to graduating. That focus became essential to the educational model. . . . We were committed to saying, students have to start to see themselves on a college campus, so we built that. . . . We want kids to go across the street [to PCC]. Yes, you can get college credits here, and yes, we're going to work with you here. You need to have experience across the street. Because it's different. It's a different experience. What we want is for them to find success in high school. All right, let's get you successful here as a high school student. Then we want you to have a successful experience at PCC, or in some other college setting. We want you to face the challenge, we want to push, so that when you get pushed you're surrounded with caring adults and all these supports. (Interview with Principal Calvert)

Speaker 1: We wanted to double-block English because the biggest problem the kids have, when they go to college, is their reading and writing is behind. It's rather than doing a bunch of little bitty things the freshman year when they're still trying to figure out what high school is, the priority is really to get reading and writing skills up as much as possible, because . . . writing is just evidence of their thinking. We have looked at some places that do these little bits of "you're going to do this little activity here and there and there" but it doesn't really amount to anything or they're a place—

Interviewer: You're talking from a college and career readiness or from . . . ?

Speaker 1: Yeah. From different college and career readiness programs. Doesn't get as much as double-blocked English with a lot of intensive reading and writing. There are places that have done different things like tutoring support for all their classes or AVID kind of things . . . but they don't do as much of the real content. If you don't have content to them because you're just doing skills but no content, then there's no buy-in to it. (Teacher interview)

Staffing Priorities

After many years of not having a school counselor, Sheridan High School had a choice to bring in either a school counselor or a school resource officer (SRO). The school chose a school counselor.

For a smaller school, I think we have a lot of services that we can offer the kids. . . [an alternative program], they're based out of Newburg, that's for those kids that are challenging or they're having other issues. With the Henderson House, if we have issues with . . . kids with parents having to deal with any type of abuse. So with the other services here, we've got a drug and alcohol counselor that comes in. I've got the mental health counselor. We had a school resource officer, but it came up between the school resource officer and the school counselor, and because we weren't having . . . the huge discipline issues where we needed the SRO, we decided to go with the counselor instead. We do have that connection with the SRO. If we have citations or anything that needs to be delivered . . . they'll come pick those citations up and they'll deliver those citations to parents or guardians of those kids that are absent . . . basically really a mediation between the parents and student and us trying to build that relationship, trying to remove any type of boundary that . . . might be keeping that kid out of school. We try and . . . set that aside and do what we can to help them. That's our priority. (Interview with Dean Rech)

The school looked carefully at the needs of their students and recognized that one of the best ways they can support students and families given the local conditions is to ensure that basic needs are being addressed, including hunger, homelessness, and mental health concerns. Adding a guidance counselor to the school staff was a considered decision that made sense in light of the other services the school offered. The school maintained a relationship with the SRO, but with a light touch, based on the lack of disciplinary issues that might have necessitated the greater presence of an SRO at the school.

Using Assessment Data

The teachers at Jordan Valley use a professional learning community (PLC) model that meets on an ongoing basis throughout the school year. The intent of the PLC is to work on goal setting, to write building- and classroom-level goals around spring state testing data and the Common Core State Standards, and to use both state and classroom data to examine instruction and student achievement.

We look at data, we talk about data . . . but when you have four kids taking the English language arts assessment, it's really hard to extrapolate that into good data for anything. Basically what we do [is to look at an] individual student's data. This is that individual student's strengths and weaknesses. This is what we need to do to help that individual student. Our collective data, our cohort data, is just pretty useless. As we look at the data, mostly what we looked at is what happens in the classroom. Again, the small size really helps us. It's our own assessments, our own instruction, that we base decision making on. (Teacher interview)

The lack of useful cohort data means that the school has to rely on multiple levels and measures of data to make sense of student growth and achievement. The small class sizes mean that the school can deeply know each student and apply multiple assessments that are student-centered and locally sourced. The individual classrooms, the relationships between students and teachers, and the interactions with locally and culturally relevant curriculum (like agricultural technology) become the grist for the assessment mill. National momentum is moving toward systems of assessment that rely on multiple measures of achievement and, thus, multiple pathways toward success. The leadership team at Jordan Valley has recognized that standardized assessments provide data that are unreliable at best, and unusable at worst. Their experience crafting multiple measures that provide actionable data might serve as a model for schools just entering the discussion of the potential of multiple measures.

LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS INTO STUDENT SUCCESS

One of the powerful narratives that emerged from these case studies is the degree to which relationships between students and the adults who work in the schools create an environment where students feel known, supported, and part of the community. There are many variables that create these conditions: the small to medium size of the schools in the study, the geographic isolation of some of the schools that leads to teachers and students living in the same community, the retention and tenure of administrators and teachers leading to increased sustainability across time. While there are many potential inputs that allow for positive relationships, the outcomes of a sense of belonging and a consistency of message and approach are powerful creators of student success. At both Jordan Valley and Sheridan High Schools the small student population makes knowing the students well an easy task. There is only one social studies teacher at Jordan Valley, so at some point (and at multiple times after) that teacher is going to have all 48 students in their class.

This section highlights some of the practices that the two larger schools are using to ensure that their students are known and how those practices lead to a sense of belonging on the part of the students.

Building Culture at Crater Renaissance Academy

The deeply embedded culture at Renaissance Academy (CRA) is purposefully cultivated in various ways. The principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools provide the framework that allows teachers and students to interact in meaningful ways.

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 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 in my classroom, very transparently in our fellow teachers' classrooms . . . then I can ask students not only do we not do that here, but let's do this here, and why. Why do we do that? And so that, not that, we're not like saying we have this down, 100 percent down, I'm just saying—that's something that works for us . . . building on that community, instilling that culture together so that we can ask more of each other. And part of it is listening in respectfully on their conversation. (Teacher focus group)

A number of efforts support the creation of this school culture. The three-period block classes allow teachers to be deeply known. The Student Congress allows students to participate in the creation of the culture. The internal professional development empowers teachers to learn from and with each other as engaged professionals. This intentional and practiced approach results in the students feeling that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

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. 'Cause we want to make a safe and happy learning environment. (CRA student focus group)

Participants in Student Congress are trusted, and in fact expected, to interact and cocreate solutions to pressing issues at the school. The responsibility that is expected of the students creates engagement that, as the teacher quoted above explains, allows school staff to ask more of their students.

Freshman Academies at Jefferson

The transition to high school is difficult and can often open a crack in the system that allows students to slip through. At Jefferson the staff and administration implemented the Freshman Academies as a mechanism to ease the transition by ensuring that all freshmen are deeply known by someone at the school. The academy system was not new to Jefferson. Teachers who had participated in academy structures at Jefferson and other schools designed the Freshman Academies to provide a collaborative and intensive experience for first-year students.

Teachers in the Freshman Academy teach one less class than their colleagues. This freedom allows common planning time in which they can discuss students, design interventions, plan curriculum, and provide support to students and to each other. This approach puts greater stress on teachers in the higher grades who have larger student ratios and heavier class loads. However, the intentional focus on the freshmen creates structure and continuity for them that can carry throughout the other grades. Deep knowledge of the students allows teachers to better differentiate their instruction and craft their lessons to the unique educational interests of their students. The increased class load for teachers is thus counteracted by the more prepared and engaged students in their classes.

Jefferson's partnership with the Oregon Writing Project means that many teachers are trained in OWP practices. This common approach to writing is applied in the Freshman Academies to make sure that by the time students finish their 9th-grade year they are writing proficiently. Freshman English is double-blocked and students participate in one period of an OWP-style English class and one period of what is called college- and career-ready writing. The focused writing is meant to prepare the students for the expectations of college-level writing that they will encounter during their junior year. This again provides both a horizontal (all freshmen participate) and vertical (the learning is preparation for future endeavors) approach that provides both support and continuity for the students. Students reported that the Freshman Academies are a powerful first experience at Jefferson and that the continuity they create is helpful.

*It's easier to settle in, because you're not just switching . . . always constantly meeting all these new people right away. You kind of get into your main group, and then you all become pretty close.
(Student focus group)*

It wasn't like a set of rules for specific teachers. It used to be . . . I remember I would have different teachers [at my old school] and they would all say different things . . . The fact that it was uniform throughout the whole academy made it kind of . . . I don't know, it just helped. (Student focus group)

It is from this deeply relational beginning that students are then asked to take on further responsibilities as participants in a middle college program where they are expected to expand their own education beyond the walls of the high school itself. Principal Calvert echoes the teacher at Crater Renaissance Academy when she says:

Our teachers understand that [the way that] students in school [interact is] relational. We accept that in the premise that students will do more for teachers who they believe care for them and want them to do well. . . . That is just in the fabric of the work.

It is important that students feel seen and known within the school building. It creates an atmosphere of acceptance and comfort. However the creation of a school culture of "known-ness" is incomplete if it is not tapped for its educative potential. Knowing the students means teachers can ask them to do more. In the cases of Crater Renaissance and Jefferson, the students are responding to the call.



STRIVING FORWARD

In the case studies described in this report, a purposeful decision was made to look for what is working at each of the participating schools and to describe the systems and structures, both formal and informal, that are supporting student learning. Of course, the story of what is happening within the schools is far more complex. Each school also has its challenges and areas where they recognize that work needs to be done to bring about the changes that they would like to see to ensure academic success for all their students. The following list is a compilation of needs identified across participating schools as those requiring additional future efforts as the schools continue to strive for secondary and postsecondary success for all their students:

- *Expanded on-site content area opportunities*
- *Expanded on-site opportunities for career and technical education (CTE)*
- *Increased availability of technology to provide more opportunities for student research activities and access to online classes*
- *Hiring of highly qualified teachers and teachers with qualifications to teach dual enrollment classes*
- *Implementation of college and career advisory classes*
- *Increased student awareness of alternatives to traditional four-year college programs*
- *Multiple pathways for meeting the needs of emerging bilingual students*
- *Earlier academic interventions at the secondary level*
- *Increased engagement with the community*
- *Expanded independent learning opportunities for students*
- *Increased engagement with parents and families on multiple issues (college/postsecondary options, support for poverty and substance abuse)*
- *Increased emphasis on career readiness, financial literacy, and other metacognitive and “soft” skills*
- *Increased opportunities for teachers to participate in racial equity/cultural competency training and responsiveness to needs of LGBTQ students*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The case study approach to investigating models of school success reveals a wealth of rich and contextual data. In telling the stories of these schools, however, it should be noted that the stories we are able to tell are limited due to constraints of time and generalizability. In order to extend and deepen the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

- Continue to explore and disseminate the stories of current practices that are in place across successful schools, using newer data, alternative measures to define college and career readiness, and/or a targeted focus on specific factors. Examples of areas for further research include
 - schools of particular types not covered in the current case studies:
 - larger high schools
 - more and varied rural schools
 - tribal schools
 - charter/alternative schools
 - schools with large Latino populations
 - schools identified using a different composition of factors to define success in college and career readiness
 - the impact of innovative and/or culturally sustaining practice on schoolwide structures, school budgets, and college and career readiness
 - longitudinal, multimethod case studies of postsecondary outcomes for students from schools identified as successful; this study could include a cost/benefit analysis assessing the cost per successful postsecondary outcome
- Conduct a statewide survey examining frequency of occurrence and diversity of implementation of the practices identified in the current case studies to determine the breadth of practice and whether these practices correlate with metrics of college and career readiness at the school level.
- Investigate implementation of specific practice(s) of interest (e.g., teacher collaboration) and costs of implementing practices at the school level.
- Identify and investigate practices in schools that are “on the move” (i.e., exhibit 3- to 5-year positive changes in metrics related to college and career readiness). Variables of interest may include:
 - instructional practice
 - student demographics
 - school/district size
 - leadership
 - funding allocations
 - community partnerships

Schools are complex institutions, and their success lies at the confluence of people, programs, community, and history. They cannot, and should not, be reduced to single metrics of achievement, nor reduced to binary distinctions of success and failure. The four schools in this study were shown to be achieving something beyond expectation. However, the successes highlighted in this study barely scratch the surface of the efforts that created them. Foundational in the School Success Model that guided our work are the attitudes, beliefs, theoretical frameworks, and values that create conditions where school success is possible. It is hoped that the cases illustrated in this study provide a profound exploration of how these schools organized the foundational elements in service of their students and demonstrate the importance of institutional coherence as schools attempt to make sense of their work.