

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT (SIG) PRACTICE: CHANGING LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

BURKE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

BURKE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT ♦ WAYNESBORO, GEORGIA

To clarify administrator roles and responsibilities for teacher and student performance support, the principal of Burke County High School (Burke) adopted a shared leadership model. In this model, all school administrators focus on evaluating and supporting teachers to improve instruction; they also monitor student progress to improve on-time graduation rates. Burke's strategies for cultivating shared leadership include (1) redefining the roles and responsibilities of school administrators and (2) promoting and hiring staff to support administrators and teachers in the improvement efforts.

THE STRATEGY: Redefining Management Roles While Promoting and Hiring Staff

Management of the school turnaround efforts at Burke is shared by the principal, with the assistant principals and staff in new leadership positions. The strategy redefines how and by whom the school and key improvement practices are managed. The strategy includes:

- Providing additional instructional support to teachers by assigning assistant principals the responsibility for teacher evaluation and support.
- Providing additional support to students by assigning assistant principals the responsibility for monitoring student progress toward on-time high school graduation.
- Adding new staff positions to support assistant principals and reduce some of the administrative burdens placed on teachers.

Assistant Principal Responsibilities for Operational Management and Teacher Evaluation and Support. Prior to the school's restructuring, Burke's six assistant principals managed discipline within specific grades and assisted with other school management functions as needed. Most assistant principals, however, were not responsible for supporting instruction and they did not have defined areas of school management responsibility. To maximize their leadership role in the school and increase their involvement in providing instructional support to teachers, the principal assigned each assistant principal several additional responsibilities: managing one of six areas of school

Burke County High School at a Glance

SIG Model: Transformation

Start of SIG Implementation: 2010–11

Locale: Rural, Fringe

Grades: 9–12

Enrollment: 1,213

Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: 79%

Racial/Ethnic Composition: 68% Black, 30% White, 2% Other, <1% American Indian, <1% Asian, <1% Hispanic

English Learners: <1%

Students With Disabilities: 8%

Student Outcomes	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Reading % proficient	81%	92%	85%
Math % proficient	67%	88%**	65%**
Graduation rate	*	67%	75%

Note: Percentages for English Learners and students with disabilities are from the Civil Rights Data Collection and may be based on a different total enrollment of students than the enrollment figure reported by the Common Core of Data.

* Four-year regulatory adjusted cohort graduation data were not reported by states prior to school year (SY) 2010–11; therefore, no graduation rate data are indicated for SY 2009–10.

This profile was prepared by American Institutes for Research under contract to the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, in consultation with the Office of School Turnaround in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. This series of profiles is based on telephone interviews with the selected sites and does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department. The Department has not independently verified the content of these profiles and does not guarantee accuracy or completeness. Not all of the activities described in the profiles are funded through SIG, and the inclusion of the information in these profiles is not intended to reflect a determination by the Department that any activity, product, program, intervention, model, or service mentioned may be supported with SIG funds. The Department has not determined that the practices in these profiles are effective and does not endorse or recommend any organization, product, or program mentioned in these profiles or any views expressed in these profiles; the practices described herein are provided merely for informational purposes. [November 2014]

operations (i.e., academics, instructional technology, building and facilities, student affairs, community affairs, and alternative education programs) and evaluating and supporting teachers. In addition, all assistant principals continue to support teachers in managing student discipline.

Manage School Operations. Before assistant principals assumed leadership roles in the six defined areas, there was ambiguity about oversight of operational functions such as instructional technology or community affairs. The assistant principals' job titles now reflect their responsibilities and signal to other staff and to the community the role that each assistant principal plays in the school:

- The assistant principal of **academics** works with the principal and the other assistant principals to coordinate Burke's plans for curriculum and instruction and also supervises the work of the school's instructional coaches.
- The assistant principal of **instructional technology** manages the school's online master schedule of classes as well as technology maintenance, staff training for technology, use of student scheduling software, use of information system software, and other school technology.
- The assistant principal of **operations** is responsible for building and facilities management, including supervising building maintenance, paying utilities bills, providing adequate space for teacher and student use, and managing rental agreements for public use of the school's auditorium.
- The assistant principal of **student affairs** oversees the school's nonacademic features of student life, coordinates extracurricular programs for students, and organizes student assemblies.
- The assistant principal of **community affairs** supervises parent liaisons and helps build connections between the school and the larger community. Because the school does not have a formal parent-teacher association, this assistant principal also oversees efforts to improve parent engagement and involvement by hosting parent meetings on topics such as graduation requirements and college preparation.
- The assistant principal for **alternative education** oversees the school's semiautonomous alternative education program and has expertise in supporting students who have struggled in the traditional high school environment.

When assigning the new roles, the principal matched each assistant principal's skills with those required by the leadership position. For example, the assistant principal of operations has strong organizational skills, is able to manage contracts, and has a good rapport with faculty and other school staff.

Evaluate and Support Teachers. In addition to managing their areas of school operations, five of the six assistant principals¹—in addition to the principal—each evaluate² approximately 12 to 15 teachers within a content area (i.e., mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies).³ Although the state requires four walk-throughs per year, Burke's teacher evaluators elected to conduct more frequent walk-throughs to collect ongoing information about teacher progress in meeting the state's 10 teacher performance standards.⁴ Every week, Burke's teacher evaluators and instructional coaches conduct walk-throughs in five to seven classrooms, measuring teacher practice related to two or three of the state's performance standards (such as professional knowledge, instructional planning, or assessment strategies). The teacher evaluators meet once a week throughout the school year to discuss concerns or exemplary work based on information gathered during the walk-throughs. They electronically record the observation data and provide feedback to teachers directly or through the instructional coach.

During the 2012–13 school year, the assistant principals and principal noted that some teachers did not post student work in their classrooms or that the posted work was not appropriately graded. They notified the instructional coach to work with the teachers in implementing the school's policy and arranging for these teachers to observe other teachers who were meeting this goal. Posting student work allows the school to emphasize that student work is

valued and also facilitates shared learning among students. Students are able to review the ideas and presentation of other students as well as student comments and then identify ways to improve their own work. In addition, by reviewing teacher comments on student work, Burke's administrators are able to monitor teacher assessment of students, a key focus of the Georgia teacher evaluation system.

Assistant Principal Responsibilities for Monitoring Student Progress. Assistant principals track student progress toward graduation. To address Georgia's recent focus on on-time high school graduation, Burke groups its students into cohorts based on their expected year of graduation. For example, Cohort 13 is the group of students who entered high school in fall 2009 and were expected to graduate in spring 2013. Each cohort includes a group of approximately 300 students who remain in their cohort until they graduate, regardless of whether they fail one or more grades.⁵ Four assistant principals each lead one of the cohorts.⁶ Burke also assigns advisory responsibility to teachers and the assistant principal for groups of 10 to 12 students within a cohort. As the advisor, the teacher or assistant principal monitors, supervises, and supports each student through graduation. The teacher or assistant principal meets individually with his or her students at least twice a month to review their progress and performance data, including accrued credits toward graduation and course grades.

To support monitoring progress toward graduation, Burke developed Cohort Action Teams. Members of these teams include a cohort's assistant principal, the school's graduation coach (hired to monitor and manage graduation indicator data), and a subset of four or five of each cohort's teacher advisors. Each cohort's assistant principal and the school's graduation coach lead the team's monthly meetings. The teams analyze student progress toward graduation using data on student course performance and credit accumulation as well as performance on the state assessments. They focus on identifying which students are struggling academically. For example, if a student's interim progress report shows that he or she is in danger of failing a class, the team may recommend that the student receive school-based tutoring services.⁷

New Staff Positions. Burke added several new staff positions to support assistant principals and reduce some of the administrative burdens placed on teachers. Supported by SIG, Race to the Top, and district funding, the additional positions include instructional coaches to support the assistant principal of academics, a graduation coach to assist the Cohort Action Teams, a testing coordinator, and various data clerks.

Instructional Coaches. The principal promoted four lead teachers to serve as full-time instructional coaches. These teachers provide guidance to mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies teachers during collaborative planning sessions; help the assistant principal of academics monitor instruction to ensure that it meets state instructional and assessment standards; provide on-site professional development; and analyze student-level performance data. Instructional coaches also help teachers organize their classrooms, identify exemplary lessons to share with other staff, and meet any particularly challenging state teacher performance standards.

Graduation Coach. Burke's graduation coach works with teachers and students to monitor progress toward graduation and also manages the school's cohort graduation rate data reported to the Georgia Department of Education. In addition, the graduation coach helps Burke's student athletes meet National Collegiate Athletic Association requirements for college athletics participation.

Testing Coordinator and Data Clerks. Burke's principal hired a testing coordinator to manage the assessment needs of academic departments, including providing test proctors and organizing before-school and after-school test preparation for students. The principal also hired data clerks, who enter student assessment data into a centralized system. The testing coordinator and data clerks relieve administrators and teachers of the burdens of organizing testing and of entering diagnostic, interim, summative, and college entrance assessment data. As a result, educators have more planning time to spend on analyzing student needs and identifying supports.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Burke's principal indicated that the biggest challenge he faced was getting administrative and instructional staff to embrace the urgency of their SIG-funded work. Designation as a transformation school required that all school staff adopt new, higher performance expectations for teachers and students. The principal noted that two factors critical to the success of a shared leadership strategy are (1) a shared vision among administrative and instructional staff and (2) a willingness to work hard. The principal also emphasized the importance of giving improvement plans sufficient time to develop and being willing to make changes to those plans based on teacher feedback and student performance data.

An increase in the on-time graduation rate bolstered the staff's engagement. Burke's on-time graduation rate in 2011–12 was 75 percent, up from 68 percent in 2010–11. Burke's principal attributed the increase to the school's efforts to develop teacher leaders through their participation in Cohort Action Teams and the assistant principals' contribution to both the quality of instruction and the ongoing monitoring of student progress.

SUSTAINABILITY

Burke's principal planned ahead for the end of SIG funding by slowly reducing the number of instructional coaches and returning these teachers back to their classrooms. Because Burke has a relatively stable instructional and administrative staff, the principal expects that teachers will incorporate the strategies introduced by the coaches into their professional practice. Local funds will continue to support the graduation coach and data clerks. The principal plans to continue using the cohort model of teaching and supporting students after SIG funding ends.

CONCLUSION

The principal of Burke County High School adopted a shared leadership model in which he made all the school's administrators responsible for helping to improve teacher and student performance. By redefining the roles and responsibilities of school administrators and promoting and hiring new support staff, the principal brought added focus and support to the school's efforts to improve the performance of teachers and students.

SOURCES

Data for the tables on page 1 are from the following sources: School at-a-glance data are from the NCES Common Core of Data (2011–12); SIG information is from SIG-Awarded Schools (2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13) located at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>; students with disabilities and English Learner student percentage enrollment data are from the Civil Rights Data Collection (2011–12); and student outcomes data are from ED Facts (2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12).

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

¹ The assistant principal for alternative education is responsible for evaluating the alternative education teachers. The assistant principal of academics does not evaluate teachers.

² Prior to evaluating teachers, the principal and the four assistant principals (Burke's teacher evaluators) participate in state- and district-sponsored training on how to conduct formal classroom observations and walk-throughs to evaluate teacher performance based on Georgia's 10 teacher performance standards.

³ The fine arts teachers and the career and technical education teachers are assigned to an assistant principal based on the proximity of their classrooms to the mathematics, English language arts, science, or social studies departments.

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS (continued)

⁴ Georgia's 10 teacher performance standards focus on the following competencies: professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, assessment strategies, assessment uses, positive learning environment, academically challenging learning environment, professionalism, and communication.

⁵ Each assistant principal was initially assigned to a student cohort based on the assistant principal's prior role in the school. For example, if an assistant principal had been responsible in 2011–12 for managing discipline in the 10th grade, he or she is responsible for overseeing the 10th-grade cohort expected to graduate in spring 2014 (Cohort 14). After an assistant principal's cohort of students graduates, that assistant principal becomes responsible for the next group of first-year students (e.g., the assistant principal in charge of Cohort 13 then became in charge of Cohort 17 students, who entered high school in fall 2013 and are expected to graduate in spring 2017).

⁶ The assistant principal of academics does not have additional responsibility for a student cohort. The assistant principal of alternative education is responsible for reviewing the progress of all students enrolled in the alternative program.

⁷ Burke's main source of support for students who are falling behind in school is the 21st Century Community Learning Centers–funded after-school program, which provides remediation and tutoring support to help students complete class assignments and prepare for tests.