

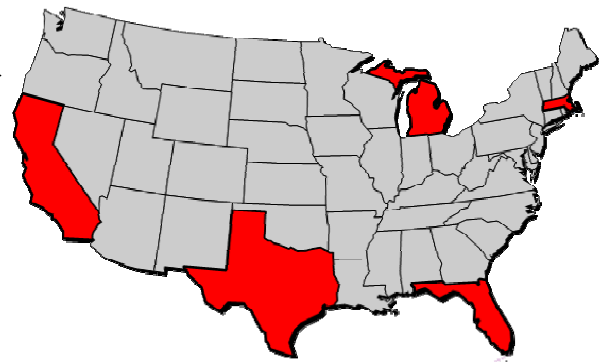


## CASE STUDY

# Core Practices in Math & Science: An Investigation of Consistently Higher Performing Schools in Five States

## The High School for Health Professions

South Texas  
Independent School  
District (TX)



### Introduction

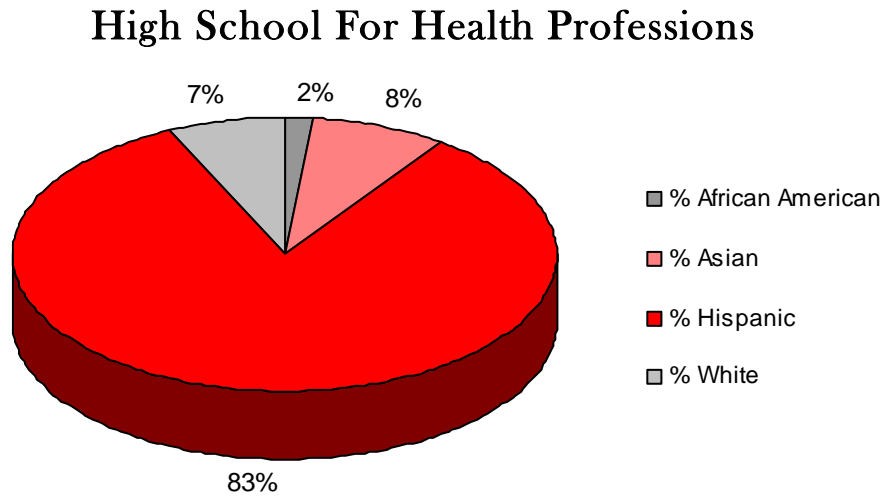
Since 1999, the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) and its affiliated research teams have studied over 500 public schools across the country in an effort to identify and disseminate effective practices embraced by higher performing schools that distinguish their campuses from their average-performing peers. Building on the foundation established by this previous research, NCEA sought in the current study to focus specifically on educational practices in the areas of mathematics and science in five states: California, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Texas.

Criteria used in school selection in the current study included three years of state assessment data in mathematics and science (2004, 2005, and 2006), campus demographic make-up, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, school size, and geographic location. In addition, all of the schools selected for participation met the state and federal requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2006. Schools categorized as higher performing based on the selection criteria were those “beating the odds” with consistently better student achievement over three years, when compared to peer campuses with a similar student population. Therefore, a list of the state’s highest performing schools may contain schools different from those selected for this study.<sup>1</sup>

In order to illuminate the roles of different members in a school community, for each selected school, NCEA researchers interviewed district-level administrators, school administrators, and classroom teachers. To supplement the interview data, researchers collected pertinent documents, observed secondary level algebra classes, and invited participants to take part in the NCEA *Self-Assessment* online.

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information about the school identification process and the list of higher performing schools included in the study, please see the full cross-case report at <http://www.nc4ea.org>.

**Figure 1: Student Demographics**



## District and School Profile

Four secondary schools comprise the South Texas Independent School District in the Rio Grande Valley near the Texas/Mexico border. This district serves 2,454 students in schools within the towns of Mercedes, San Benito, and Edinburg. South Texas ISD recruits students from 28 area school districts. Though all of the district's three high schools and one junior/senior high school are magnet schools, these schools accept students on a first-come, first-served basis. The district provides free bus transportation to all its students. Each district school is organized around a particular career theme, since the district's mission is to identify career needs in the Rio Grande Valley area and train students to fill these needs.

Located in Mercedes, Texas, the High School for Health Professions (Med High) serves 661 students in Grades 9 through 12. The school's career theme focuses on the healthcare field. Students take health science electives designed to train them for careers as various types of health professionals, such as dental and nursing assistants, pharmacy technicians, nutritionists, and veterinary assistants. During their senior year, students complete clinical internships at area hospitals and health practices. The school's student population is 83% Hispanic. Approximately 55% of students receive free and reduced-price lunch services, and 2.3% are English language learners

After graduation, many students earn certifications in their chosen field. However, teachers and school leaders at Med High encourage all students to attend college immediately after high school. According to a school counselor, about 98% of Med High graduates go on to college, with 95% attending four-year colleges or

universities and 2% attending two-year colleges. Many students use their vocational training and certification to support themselves financially while they attend college.

As a strong proponent of higher standards, NCEA recognizes school efforts to move more students to the state's higher standard of achievement by accounting for those students in the analysis of consistent higher performance. Tables 1 and 2 summarize performance at both the state's proficient and advanced standards attained by the students at Med High for the years of 2004, 2005, and 2006. The state averages included in the tables represent student performance among schools with a student population similar to Med High, particularly based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

**Table 1: Performance Trends Based on Proficiency Standard**

Grade	2004			2005			2006		
	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11
Mathematics	70%	82%	89%	85%	87%	95%	100%	79%	96%
Science	Not Tested	73%	79%	Not Tested	83%	88%	Not Tested	85%	95%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	39%	39%	55%	46%	48%	63%	45%	51%	70%
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	37%	50%	Not Tested	42%	61%	Not Tested	48%	65%

**Table 2: Performance Trends Based on Advanced Standard**

Grade	2004			2005			2006		
	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11
Mathematics	41%	47%	44%	47%	49%	54%	25%	30%	50%
Science	Not Tested	16%	16%	Not Tested	17%	27%	Not Tested	18%	11%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	15%	14%	15%	17%	19%	18%	16%	21%	21%
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	5%	5%	Not Tested	7%	7%	Not Tested	9%	10%

## Theme 1

### Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Teachers in all district schools follow a rigorous curriculum aligned with the knowledge and skills necessary for all students to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

- School and district stakeholders recognize that their ultimate goal as educators is to prepare students for success in college and skilled careers. All schools offer the same sequence of core content courses, including a required four years each of math and science. To graduate from high school in South Texas ISD, students must complete 27 courses, while the state of Texas requires only 24 courses. Beginning in the 2008-09 school year, the district plans to require 28 courses for graduation.
- Elective courses connect to the school's career theme, so each of the four district schools offers a different set of electives. At Med High, the elective course sequence prepares students to pass certification exams and requirements for various health science professions. As one teacher explained, "Med High does not believe in the 'shopping mall' approach to education, where students choose from a selection of unrelated courses. Instead, we focus on one themed area, and have every student take a similarly rigorous curriculum."
- Med High anchors ambitious academic goals to established long-range goals for all students. When communicating with students and parents, district and school leaders reinforce the message that success in college requires the development of advanced academic skills. A district administrator explained, "When we have conversations with parents, we always say that our goal is not just to get their child into college but get them to *finish* college. Many parents are not aware that the majority of students who enroll in college nationwide fail to graduate. We try to shift the conversation from a focus on earning a high school diploma to a focus on college readiness. Parents then understand that developing higher-level academic skills is what matters. Students are more likely to take their coursework and their education seriously if they understand that it is connected to the development of specific skills and knowledge that they will need in college and in the workforce."
- School leaders encourage all students to take advanced courses. Med High offers Advanced Placement (AP) or pre-AP versions of most core subject-area courses, and these classes are open to any student who wishes to enroll. During the 2006-07 school year, over 97% of Med High students took an AP, pre-AP, or dual-enrollment course. School leaders recently decided to offer some courses only in the pre-AP format. For example, all entering 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students must enroll in pre-AP English and pre-AP Integrated Physics and

Chemistry, and all 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students complete pre-AP World History. “In the past,” a counselor explained, “we found that too many freshmen were nervous or insecure about enrolling in pre-AP courses, especially those students who were coming to Med High from small towns. We wanted to show them that they can definitely handle pre-AP and, later AP, work, so we made it mandatory.”

District and school leaders focus on a carefully selected set of academic goals and improvement targets, stated in terms of student achievement.

- District and school leaders work collaboratively to develop a school improvement plan whose goals are anchored to specific student achievement goals. When working with district leaders to write their school improvement plans, principals must set targets for multiple student achievement measures. These include achievement on the state tests (the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS), SAT scores, passing rates in Algebra I courses, the number of students taking AP and pre-AP courses, and post-secondary enrollment rates. Principals also set goals for attendance, graduation rates, and dropout rates.
- When making decisions about district policies and activities, district leaders prioritize academic goals over non-academic goals. They believe that de-emphasizing extracurricular activities ensures that students, teachers, and parents maintain a strong, single-minded focus on academics. For example, there are no competitive sports, marching bands, or cheerleading squads at any school in the district. Schools offer a limited number of intramural sports teams. A district administrator noted that earlier in his career, when he worked in more traditional districts, he spent most of his time as an administrator focusing on non-academic issues, such as extracurricular activities, sports, and behavior/discipline concerns. “At South Texas ISD,” he noted, “most of my conversations with parents and students center around academics.”

Teachers are deeply involved the development of the district curricular materials. As a result, all teachers understand what they need to teach and what their students need to learn.

- Teams of teachers work together across the district to develop documents that give clarity to the curriculum. At the beginning of each school year, teachers from all four schools meet together to develop scope and sequence documents for all core content-area courses. These documents specify when and how to address the state standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for each subject and grade level.
- In addition to writing scope and sequence guides, vertical teams of teachers from across the district meet periodically to align the curriculum across grade levels. In these meetings, vertical teams of teachers develop Essential

Learning Outcomes (ELOs) for core content areas. The ELOs delineate exactly what skills and knowledge students need to be able to demonstrate after they complete a specific course, so that teachers of the next course in the sequence know where and when they need to start. A district administrator explained, “The ELOs are useful because they provide much more detail than the state standards for these subjects.”

- Teachers take responsibility for ensuring that all students learn the skills and knowledge described in the written curriculum. Because teachers know exactly what is to be taught and learned in their classes, school leaders at Med High allow teachers flexibility in how they follow their scope and sequence guides. The guides are organized into three-week increments, and within each three-week period, teachers can decide when and how they teach each objective. A teacher can either use the scope and sequence as a lesson plan or diverge from it completely. Teachers who want to diverge from the scope and sequence have to get principal approval and turn in lesson plans to the principal. The principal at Med High explained, “I believe in empowering teachers by letting them generate ideas and strategies. I’ll nearly always let teachers try new approaches to instruction. Student performance data will show whether or not it is working.”

## Theme 2

### **Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building**

The district identifies promising instructional leaders and encourages them to apply for open principal positions.

- Developing internal candidates for principalships helps South Texas ISD maintain consistently high academic standards across district schools. District leaders hire the majority of principals from within: three out of the four principals currently working in the district were internal hires. A district administrator reported that he often hires promising educators as assistant principals or even teachers, and then promotes them when a principal position opens.
- Once the district hires principals, it entrusts them with a large share of decision-making in areas related to teaching and learning. Decisions regarding new instructional programs, personnel selection and assignment, and professional development occur at the school level. The principal remarked that she appreciated the trust and support she received from district administrators. “This district expects me to be an instructional leader, not just a building manager,” she noted.

District and school leaders use multiple strategies to recruit effective, highly qualified teachers and administrators.

- When allocating resources, district administrators prioritize the recruitment and selection of excellent teachers and school leaders. According to a district administrator, South Texas ISD offers the third highest teacher pay in the state and the seventh highest pay for administrators. The district nearly always recruits several qualified applicants for each open position.
- Candidates for open positions are often drawn to the district's reputation for academic excellence. A district administrator explained, "South Texas ISD is a great place to work because of the focus on academics. Educators in Texas know this." District and school administrators reported that positive word-of-mouth in the community helps them recruit teachers in shortage areas, such as math, science, and health science electives. For example, the school recruits teachers at area universities that offer alternative teaching certification programs. A school administrator noted, "This helps us recruit teachers in the health science areas. Many of these teachers work as medical professionals for the first part of their career, and then decide to pursue teaching later, through an alternative certification program. Sometimes they'll get interested in the school after meeting, and being impressed by, Med High students who are participating in internships in medical offices."
- School leaders trust their current teachers to identify promising teacher applicants. A school administrator reported that whenever she has an opening in a shortage area such as math or science, she talks to her math and science teachers and encourages them to recruit friends, former colleagues, and graduate school classmates.

District and school leaders seek out professional development opportunities that that connect to current instructional needs.

- School and district professional development plans further the district's central goal of teaching an academically rigorous curriculum to all students. District leaders centered recent professional development activities on a multi-year partnership with Advanced Placement Strategies, based in Dallas, TX. Teachers attend workshops during the school year and in the summer where they learn about ways to infuse greater rigor into their AP and pre-AP courses. One teacher reported that he uses the techniques and methods he learned in the AP Strategies training in his pre-AP and AP science classes. As a result, he noted, his students are working much harder. "I don't spend as much time entertaining the students now," he said, "I've had to set that aside and really focus on curriculum."
- Teachers select school-based professional development based upon their instructional needs and academic goals. According to a school administrator,

Med High bases its professional development planning process on the “Good to Great” model popular in the business world. At the beginning of the year, the administrator explained, teachers and administrators meet together to identify the academic and instructional areas where they are “great,” the areas where they are “good,” and their areas of weakness. Then, they identify professional development opportunities that will help them move along that continuum, in each area, over the course of the school year. The administrator explained, “In each of the three areas, we want to move from not-good to good, and from good to great. In the areas where we are already great, we need to figure out how to maintain greatness.”

- District resources and support allow teachers and school leaders to participate in professional development that supports the use of evidence-based instructional practices. A school administrator reported that the district is “incredibly supportive” of any professional development program that has been shown to help teachers raise student academic achievement. The district, she said, will always find a way to let its schools participate in valuable programs.

District and school leaders both support and require teacher collaboration.

- South Texas ISD recently implemented a new initiative supporting the development of professional learning communities on each campus. To help build a collaborative atmosphere at its schools, the district encourages academic departments to hold weekly collaborative planning sessions. In addition, principals create lead teacher positions in every department. The goal of the program is to build a cadre of teacher-leaders who can facilitate teams of teachers working together to share instructional strategies, develop common assessments, and analyze student data.
- Increasing opportunities for teacher collaboration within the school day has been a priority for school leaders. All teachers at Med High must collaborate closely with at least one other teacher in their department. While, in the past, one science teacher may have taught all sections of biology, and one teacher may have taught all sections of chemistry, now at least two teachers teach sections of each subject, and the two teachers work together to plan instruction. Even though most teachers must prepare an additional class, they have less work to do because each teacher works with another. Noted a school administrator, “Teachers are working smarter, not harder.” The majority of Med High’s seven math teachers and six science teachers share common planning time with their departmental colleagues, though the relatively small size of the school makes it difficult to offer this time to all math and science teachers. However, a Med High administrator reported that over the next few years, school leaders plan to implement a master schedule where each department has one common planning period at least every other day.



## Theme 3

### Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

The district collaborates closely with schools to ensure that instructional programs and practices align with the school's mission and the academic objectives of the curriculum.

- The selection of instructional programs and resources is school-based, rather than district-based. However, district leaders provide valuable advice and input during the selection process. A district administrator explained that the district gives decision-making power to schools, because instructional needs vary across schools. In the case of Med High, the school's mission is to serve the current and projected healthcare needs of the Rio Grande Valley, and the school selects instructional programs and materials that suit that mission. The district role in program selection is to help campus administrators research prospective programs and then make informed decisions.
- A Med High administrator explained that school leaders are always willing to expand the school's instructional programs to meet changing student and community needs. She explained, "The school and district always need to keep job market conditions in mind. We don't want to train students for jobs for which there is no demand. We need to keep up with the latest trends in the medical field. For example, we're currently refurbishing the dental lab and revamping instruction in dental science electives to reflect the fact that dental labs today use mainly digital equipment."

Across all classrooms, teachers use evidence-based instructional practices such as higher-order thinking, hands-on learning, and differentiated instruction. District and school leaders require use of these practices.

- District and school leaders believe that high-quality instruction requires high student engagement. They encourage teachers to keep students actively involved in the instructional process. A school administrator noted that she encourages teachers to use instruction and classroom activities that focus on applications and higher-order thinking. "Lots of students can simply regurgitate information," she explained, "but I want them to be able to *apply* facts and [figures] to real-world situations." When visiting classrooms, school and district administrators keep a careful eye out for the use of evidence-based practices, and they work with teachers who have not yet fully integrated these practices into their instruction.
- Teachers similarly reported that they push students to apply the knowledge they have learned, rather than simply repeat it. Several science teachers explained that they moved their laboratory assignments away from "cookbook labs," in which students simply repeat a set of lab procedures given to them by the teacher. Instead, they assign more exploratory labs, which ask

students to design their own experiments to answer a particular research question, carry out the experiments, and then analyze data.

- Teachers are committed to implementing the evidence-based instructional practices taught in district-sponsored professional development. One science teacher explained that he has been using the instructional techniques and methods he learned in the AP Strategies training in his pre-AP and AP classes. The training has helped him move from teaching students how to recall facts to teaching them how to think using science content. “Students now learn about science as a process,” he said. “They’re learning to think using the scientific method.”

When necessary, teachers provide adequate scaffolding so that all students can access rigorous levels of instruction.

- Teachers are skilled at rotating through a variety of different instructional approaches within a single class, tailoring their instruction to suit student needs. Teachers reported that they use plenty of hand-on activities in math and science classes, but always in combination with direct, whole-group instruction. “Hands-on instruction is good for the higher-functioning students who are pretty independent,” one teacher reported, “but the lower-functioning students need some direct/guided instruction before they are ready to tackle hands-on activities.”
- The district’s large and growing population of English language learners is served through a full-immersion approach. A district administrator explained, “Because the district consists of only secondary schools, and because we have such a rigorous curriculum, we can’t offer sheltered immersion or bilingual classes. We really have to use a full-immersion strategy with all students, even those recently arrived in the country. What the district does is put these students into an ESL classes, and then hand-pick the rest of their core content-area teachers. We will only put English language learners in core classes where the teacher is bilingual.”

## Theme 4

### **Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data**

Teachers and campus administrators regularly benchmark student and school performance.

- District administrators leave the scheduling and content of formative assessments up to each campus. The district expects teachers to administer two formative assessments per semester. However, most teachers administer them much more frequently, often every few weeks. The district encourages teachers to analyze assessment results collaboratively with teachers in the same subject and make decisions as a group about needed adjustments to instruction.

- District administrators regularly monitor campus performance and use multiple measures of student achievement to track the school's progress towards meeting the academic goals set forth in the campus improvement plan. When schools start falling short of student achievement goals, the superintendent requires them to establish plans for how they will improve. She asks them to analyze student data with their staff members and then develop detailed improvement plans for the areas in which they are falling short.

School leaders visit classrooms daily to ensure that teachers are employing effective instructional practices. Teachers receive constructive feedback to help them improve their instruction and curriculum delivery.

- School leaders spend a lot of time visiting classrooms and observing instruction. A Med High administrator explained, "Informally, teachers are evaluated all the time." The principal spends much of her time during the school day observing classes and activities. She frequently talks to students about what they are learning.
- School leaders conduct at least 10 brief classroom observations a week, which they call "reflective snapshots." District administrators frequently participate in these observations as well. Observations focus on specific dimensions of instruction: the clarity of the learning objective, whether the environment supports the learning objective, the level of learning evident, and whether the students know what they are supposed to be doing during class. Afterwards, administrators collect data and prepare feedback. Then, they suggest specific actions that need to be taken, such as observing colleagues who are stronger in a particular area or seeking out professional development.
- The criteria used in annual formal teacher evaluations are closely aligned with school goals. A school leader explained that she examines multiple sources of student data when evaluating teachers. Student data includes not just scores on the state TAKS tests, but also scores on AP and SAT exams and students' course grades. District administrators, she reported, help principals assemble and analyze data reports for each teacher.

District and school leaders carefully assess the skill level of entering 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students very early in the school year. This process helps teachers and administrators understand the needs of entering students.

- Students come to South Texas ISD from 28 different districts. District and school administrators often receive very little student-level data from feeder districts, so they do not know whether students need special education services or any other assistance. The district brings entering 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students to the campus during the summer for a four-day New Scholar Academy orientation program. They use this time to work individually with entering students, assess their skills, and get them any necessary help before the school year begins.

- Ninth-grade teachers in South Texas ISD are highly skilled at both assessing individual students and discussing these assessments with their grade-level colleagues. This is one of the top priorities for 9th-grade teachers in the initial weeks of the school year. By the end of the first six weeks of the school year, the entire 9th-grade team knows the strengths and weaknesses of each student. This is ingrained in the district's processes, a district administrator explained, because the district's goal is to bring every student up to a high level of academic achievement. "Getting them to a high level is non-negotiable," he said. "We don't believe in getting each student 'as far as they can' but getting them to the point where they can succeed in college and careers."
- Everyone at Med High works to ensure that all students possess a solid grasp of Algebra I skills, because they believe that these skills set the stage for future success in math and science. Algebra I is considered a 9th-grade class at Med High. However, students are coming to the district from over 28 different districts, and the rigor and content of middle school math courses varies across feeder middle schools. The school gives all entering students a diagnostic exam to determine math placement. After grading the diagnostic exams, math teachers meet with students and explain their suggested course placement. Some 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students are not ready for Algebra I, so they take the course in tenth grade instead. Some students who took Algebra I in eighth grade in their home districts need to repeat the course in ninth grade at Med High. A school counselor explained that most students are perfectly happy to repeat Algebra I in ninth grade because they understand that they need this foundational knowledge in order to do well in other classes. "Med High wants all their students to be on an even playing field, with no gaps in their knowledge" she said.

Throughout the school year, teachers and school leaders monitor the academic progress of individual students closely and frequently. Teachers share this information with parents, students, and their colleagues at the school.

- Teachers identify students with significant learning gaps as early as possible. Every three weeks, teachers complete progress reports for all students. Each teacher reviews the progress reports of all students in her homeroom, and if she identifies a struggling student, she puts him on an individualized improvement plan. Improvement plans often require that a student attend tutoring. Teachers share the improvement plan with parents. The principal noted that, over the past few years, the school has made significant progress in getting all teachers more personally involved in monitoring individual students. Teachers make many more parent phone calls now than they did in the past.
- Because the district is so small, monitoring of individual student performance occurs even at the district level. A district administrator noted that he regularly

reviews students' transcripts at all district schools and then follows up with individual students who seem to be falling behind. The district, he noted, trusts school leaders to make most decisions regarding teaching and learning. At the same time, he said, the district is "very aware of where each student is academically."

## Theme 5

### Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

The rigorous district and school curriculum offers advanced students multiple opportunities to receive accelerated or extended learning opportunities.

- Furthering South Texas ISD's goal of preparing students to succeed in higher education, Med High allows advanced students to begin earning college credit as early as eleventh grade. District high schools offer dual-enrollment courses in areas such as statistics, Spanish, English literature, and psychology. The district offers extra incentive pay to teachers who earn master's degrees, with the goal of increasing the number of teachers who are qualified to teach dual-enrollment classes.
- The district maintains concurrent enrollment arrangements with local colleges and universities, such as the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg. These partnerships allow Med High students to take college classes while still in high school. A district administrator noted that South Texas ISD is always working to expand its partnerships with colleges and universities, in order to offer more concurrent enrollment courses.

The school offers a number of proven, practical intervention programs, such as after-school tutoring, for students with learning difficulties. The school's master schedule provides intervention time for any student who needs help.

- Teachers identify students who are struggling academically as early as possible. Counselors meet with these students and arrange for them to receive extra assistance outside their regular classes. The school builds a 30-minute tutorial period into the daily school schedule. In keeping with the school's health science theme, these tutorials are known as "morning rounds." During morning rounds, students must meet with teachers for tutoring, study independently, or attend meetings related to extracurricular activities. Teachers also provide after-school tutoring on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Because all students are bussed into Med High from nearby communities, the district provides a second round of buses in the afternoon to accommodate the students who stay for tutoring.
- In order to keep students on track for high school graduation, Med High gives students opportunities to make up missed schoolwork. All schools in the

district offer catch-up opportunities, known as “contracts.” Every six weeks, teachers offer contract opportunities to students with a class average of 65% to 70%. These students are in danger of failing, but their teachers believe that they can pass if they put in some extra work. Teachers review their students’ work to identify the concepts the students struggled with in class and then ask struggling students to repeat class assignments in those areas. Each of these students and her parents sign a contract identifying the work that she will complete. After the student turns in the make-up assignments, the teacher evaluates whether or not she has demonstrated mastery of the concepts. As a school counselor explained, the idea underlying the contract system is that a student who failed to master a few concepts should not have to repeat an entire course and fall further behind.

- Recognizing the importance of early interventions, teachers and counselors identify struggling 9th-grade students and work with them to avoid retention. Med High offers after-school “restart” classes during the spring semester for 9th-grade students who failed a math, science, or English class in the first semester. In the restart class, they get to re-learn and make up the work they failed in the first semester.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Student Learning: Expectations & Goals**

All schools in the district follow a rigorous curriculum aligned with the knowledge and skills necessary for all students to graduate college and career-ready. District and school leaders focus on a carefully selected set of academic goals and improvement targets, stated in terms of student achievement. Teachers are deeply involved in the development of district curricular materials. As a result, all teachers understand what they need to teach and what their students need to learn.

### **Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building**

District and school leaders use multiple strategies to recruit effective, highly qualified teachers and administrators. The district identifies promising instructional leaders and encourages them to apply for open principal positions. All educators participate in professional development that is closely connected to classroom practice. To further develop skills and share successful instructional practices, district and school leaders both support and require teacher collaboration.

### **Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies**

The district collaborates closely with schools to ensure that instructional programs and practices align with each school’s mission and the academic objectives of the

curriculum. Across all classrooms, teachers use evidence-based instructional practices such as higher-order thinking, hands-on learning, and differentiated instruction. District and school leaders require use of these practices. When necessary, teachers provide adequate scaffolding so that all students can access rigorous levels of instruction.

### **Monitoring, Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data**

Teachers and campus administrators regularly benchmark student and school performance. School leaders visit classrooms daily and give teachers constructive feedback to help them improve instruction and curriculum delivery. In order to help teachers and administrators understand the needs of students entering their classes, district and school leaders have developed detailed procedures for assessing the skill level of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students very early in the year. Throughout the school year, teachers monitor the academic progress of individual students and share their findings with parents, students, and colleagues.

### **Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment**

Med High's rigorous curriculum offers advanced students multiple opportunities to receive accelerated or extended learning opportunities. For students with learning difficulties, the school offers a number of proven, practical intervention programs, such as after-school tutoring. The school's master schedule has been organized to provide extra time for any student who needs help.



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