mn DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

Best Practices in High-Performing Schools

Fiscal Year 2023

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.35, subdivision 4

For more information:

As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately $669.35 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

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Legislative Charge

This report is consistent with the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.35, subdivision 4, which states, "Consistent with the requirements of this section, beginning June 20, 2012, the commissioner must annually report to the public and the legislature best practices implemented in those schools that are identified as high performing under federal expectations."

Introduction

Continuous improvement is vital to Minnesota's school system. While continuous improvement can be measured in a variety of ways, one method is to examine schools that have shown improvement on federal accountability indicators. This report focuses on schools that were identified for support under Minnesota's North Star system for school accountability under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2018 and went on to fully exit that status in 2022.

To fully exit identification, schools needed to not only avoid being identified again, but, also to show improvement on every accountability indicator that led to their identification in 2018. The exact indicators varied by school, but were always some combination of:

- math achievement
- reading achievement
- progress toward English language proficiency (for multilingual learners identified as English learners)
- math progress (for elementary and middle schools)
- reading progress (for elementary and middle schools)
- graduation rates (for high schools), and
- consistent attendance (the opposite of chronic absenteeism).

Of the schools identified for support in 2018, 30 schools were not identified in 2022 and met all exit criteria.

Schools Exiting Identification in 2022

District or Charter School Network	School
Agamim Classical Academy	Agamim Classical Academy
Anoka-Hennepin Public School District	Anoka High
Anoka-Hennepin Public School District	Coon Rapids High
Anoka-Hennepin Public School District	Lincoln Elementary
Bemidji Public School District	Northern Elementary
Cloquet Public School District	Churchill Elementary
Cloquet Public School District	Washington Elementary
Columbia Heights Public School Dist	Highland Elementary
Community Of Peace Academy	Community Of Peace Academy Elementary School
East Grand Forks Public School Dist	South Point Elementary
Fisher Public School District	Fisher Elementary
Hermantown Public School District	Hermantown Elementary

District or Charter School Network	School
Intermediate School District 287	NSO - Independent Study / ALC-IS
Inver Grove Heights Schools	Simley Alternative Program
Jennings Community School	Jennings Experiential High School
Mahnomen Public School District	Mahnomen Secondary
Metro Schools Charter	Metro Schools Charter
Minnesota Internship Center	Sabathani Campus/SOAR Campus
Minnesota Transitions Charter School	Minnesota Connections Academy
Minnesota Transitions Charter School	MTS Pease Academy
Moose Lake Public School District	Moose Lake Elementary
Pine River-Backus School District	Pine River-Backus Area Learning Center
Rosa Parks Charter High School	Rosa Parks Charter High School
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan	Westview Elementary
Roseville Public School District	Roseville Area Middle
Thief River Falls School District	Northwest Area Learning Center
West Central Education District	West Central Area Learning Center
Minnesota River Valley Education District	Minnesota River Valley ALC
South Koochiching	Northome Elementary
Duluth Public Schools	Denfeld High School

Analysis

When examining the practices used by these schools, three key themes emerged:

- Implementation of evidence-based practices
- Targeting support
- Building relationships

Theme 1: Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

Under the terms of ESSA, each school identified for support in 2018 was required to select at least one evidence-based practice to address one or more of the reasons the school was identified. Schools generally selected these evidence-based practices after completing a comprehensive needs assessment. Many schools worked with staff from the Regional Centers of Excellence to conduct their needs assessments, select their evidence-based practice or practices, and implement those practices. While a range of practices were ultimately selected, attention to implementation proved key.

Elementary and middle schools tended to select evidence-based practices targeted at math, literacy, or both. Some included practices focused on social-emotional learning. No one practice was particularly common.

High schools tended to select the Minnesota Early Indicator and Response System (MEIRS), although at least one focused on the Building Assets/Reducing Risks (BARR) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Initiative.

Regardless of the practice selected, schools that exited identification tended to focus successfully on effectively implementing their chosen practices. Doing so included tailoring practices to their local contexts—including staffing levels, student populations, etc.—and prioritizing the use of data about adult practices. This adult practice data, which can also be called implementation data, focused on the extent to which the adults charged with carrying out the selected practice did so with fidelity and consistency. The specific data used varied in response to the selected practice or practices as well as local capacity for collecting and using this implementation data. Collection of this data could involve administrators, coaches, peers, or student surveys, and the use of the data could happen in professional learning communities, conversations with coaches, all-staff meetings, or other formats.

Theme 2: Targeting Support

A common feature of several selected practices was the information-based targeting of support to students.

For example, elementary schools often included as part of their implementation some sort of tiered support system. This could take the form of a specific system such as Response to Intervention (RTL) or a more general multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). In such systems, local data and information about students is used to determine which tier of support a student will receive and what that support will look like. Importantly, being intentional about how these aligned layers reduce the amount of time students spend pulled out into separate classes, when doing is unnecessary or counterproductive. For example, multiple schools reported that their use of tiered, targeted systems resulted in students in special education receiving core instruction of grade-level standards in their general education classrooms.

In the time since these schools made their initial selections of evidence-based practices, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has launched the Minnesota Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MnMTSS). The MnMTSS Framework, accompanying resources and tools were created by MDE in partnership with the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). It is Minnesota's first ever systemic, continuous improvement framework for ensuring positive social, emotional, behavioral, developmental, and academic outcomes for every student. Unlike the traditional RTL and MTSS models that were previously being used, MnMTSS Framework now offers five fundamental components that work together to ensure successful implementation across the entire system:

1. Infrastructure that Supports Continuous Improvement
2. Family and Community Engagement
3. Multi-Layered Practices and Support
4. Assessment
5. Data-Based Decision-Making

At the high school level, most schools used the MEIRS system to identify students in need of support and connect them with the appropriate instruction or resources. The Minnesota Department of Education and the Regional Centers of Excellence launched the current version of MEIRS in May of 2018, a few months before these schools were identified for support. MEIRS uses three primary categories of data to identify students who may be at risk of not graduating high school. These categories are attendance, behavioral incidents, and course

performance. The combination of the three as early as ninth grade allows schools to more effectively target their supports to students, as well as the selection of which supports to provide to which students. Common to tiered systems, MEIRS, and the other systems of targeting support is the regular use of local data to identify students' needs for the targeted supports.

Theme 3: Building Relationships

A final theme that emerged in some schools was an intentional focus on relationships and interventions that both rely on and strengthen adult-student relationships. These included generalized attention to social-emotional learning, including adult social-emotional learning, as well as programs like BARR and PBIS that create more explicit structures for building and maintaining relationships with students.

Conclusion

Any attention to best practices and school performance must include the domain of continuous improvement. By focusing on the selection and implementation of practices in schools that have shown particular strength in continuous improvement, this report points to further avenues for exploration and support at both the state and local level.