



**Fair Haven Union High School:  
Case of a Vermont Improving School**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fair Haven Union High School is located in Fair Haven, Vermont, on the border of Vermont and New York. Fair Haven is the only high school in the Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union and draws students from Fair Haven as well as a number of surrounding towns and villages. Almost all of the students at the school are White, but the school is socioeconomically diverse, with 48 percent of the school's 437 students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2014-15. In that year, one-fifth of students had special needs.

In recent years, the school has demonstrated remarkable gains in student achievement. For instance, from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of students at Fair Haven who scored at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) exam rose by 21 points in reading, from 58 percent to 79 percent, and 18 points in mathematics, from 26 percent to 44 percent. Among those students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the percentage point gains were 17 points for reading, from 52 percent to 69 percent, and 19 points in mathematics, from 12 percent to 31 percent.

This report describes the context in which those gains took place. At Fair Haven Union High School, the following conditions permeate the school:

**A clear focus on improving student performance.** Administrators and teachers emphasize student performance and make sure that staff and students alike prioritize assessments. The school principal has encouraged students to take assessments seriously and has made conscious efforts to reward not only students' extracurricular achievements but also their curricular and assessment successes. Teachers lead the effort to use student performance data to inform decisions about curriculum and instruction, and school administrators support that effort. In order to do this work, educators at Fair Haven Union High access resources such as assessments, assessment results, and time.

**Emphasis on core subjects.** Fair Haven requires all students to take four credits in English language arts, three credits in mathematics, three credits in science, and four credits in social studies. In some cases, students take common courses (e.g., freshman students take the same English language arts, science, and social studies courses). This practice allows teachers to create common curriculum and assessments. Additionally, the school offers a variety of Tier 2 interventions for students who struggle to grasp core content in the Tier 1 setting, and the school also offers an afterschool program – with transportation – so that students can receive additional help outside of school hours.

**Teacher collaboration.** Within their departmental professional learning communities, teachers work together to tweak curriculum, discuss successful instructional strategies, create common assessments (both rubric-based and exam-based), and discuss student progress. Teachers also work with each other on a monthly basis in interdepartmental teams, where teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with their non-departmental colleagues on matters of interest to the entire school.

**Professional school culture.** Fair Haven Union High School has a results-focused, collaborative culture, where administrators and teachers alike recognize and support educator professionalism. Teachers work as a team to develop and implement a common curriculum, with common curriculum units and assessments. Throughout the school, educators employ a common approach to instruction that emphasizes inquiry in all subjects.

**INTRODUCTION**

This report is one of five cases of improving schools that are part of a study of the cost of an adequate education in Vermont. The study is being conducted for the Vermont Legislature by Picus Odden & Associates and their partner consultants. The objective of the study is to identify a level of funding that is adequate for all schools to deploy strategies that give every student in Vermont an equal opportunity to achieve to Common Core college and career ready standards. This case describes how the improvements in student performance in the case school took place. The following sections of this report describe the socio-demographic context of the school, the school’s student performance levels, staff, goals, schedule, curriculum and instruction, assessments, interventions, professional development, and culture. The report draws upon information from two main sources: (a) review of documents provided by school officials or available online and (b) individual and focus group interviews with 23 members of the school staff (school administrators, instructional staff, and support staff) that occurred in October 2015.

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT**

Fair Haven Union High School is located in Fair Haven, Vermont, on the border of Vermont and New York. Fair Haven is the only high school in the Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union and draws students from Fair Haven as well as a number of surrounding towns and villages. The school is located in a rural area, and student activities and parent employment trends reflect a rural lifestyle. According to school officials, hunting is a popular pastime among male and female students at the school, and many parents work in agriculture. In addition to agriculture, parents of students at Fair Haven work in manufacturing, in the military, or at a nearby postsecondary institution.

According to information from the Vermont Agency of Education, in 2014-15, the school enrolled 437 students (Table 1). Enrollment at Fair Haven Union High School has declined over time; for instance, 10 years prior (2004-05), 593 students attended the school.

**Table 1: Fair Haven Union High School students and core class sizes, 2014-15**

Grade Level	Enrollment
9	111
10	108
11	126
12	92
Average core class size across grades	18.2

**Source:** Vermont Agency of Education, Enrollment Report for Rutland County: 2014-15, and personal communication with school staff.

In 2014-15, almost all of the students at Fair Haven (97 percent) were White (Table 2). Just under half (48 percent) were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and one-fifth of students (20 percent) had special needs (i.e., an IEP or a 504 plan).

**Table 2: Fair Haven Union High School student characteristics, 2014-15**

Student Characteristics	Percentage of Student Population
Race/ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	‡
Asian	‡
Black/African American	‡
Hispanic/Latino	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1
Two or more races	1
White	97
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	48
English language learners	‡
Students with special needs	20

‡ Indicates that student subgroup had no members, that the number of members in the subgroup was too small to report, given student privacy considerations, or that data were not available for the school or at the time of posting the information.

Note: The percentage of students with special needs includes students with an IEP or a 504 plan. It *excludes* students who have an EST plan.

Source: Vermont Agency of Education, School Report for Fair Haven Union High School: 2014-15.

**STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

From 2009 to 2013, student performance in both reading and mathematics improved at Fair Haven.

In *reading* (Table 3), from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of students at Fair Haven who scored at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) exam rose by:

- 21 points for all students and
- 17 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Additionally, the percentage of students who fell into the proficient with distinction category for reading increased by:

- 19 points for all students and
- 8 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The gains outlined above and displayed in Table 3 suggest that the school was successful in not only increasing the percentages of students who moved from the proficient category to the proficient with distinction category but also increasing the percentages of students who moved from below proficiency to the proficient category.

In *mathematics* (Table 4), from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of students who scored at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the NECAP exam increased by:

- 18 points for all students and
- 19 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Table 3: Percent of Fair Haven Union High School students who performed at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the NECAP grade 11 reading test, by student characteristics: 2009-2013**

Performance Level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>All students</b>					
Percent proficient	45	50	50	51	47
Percent proficient with distinction	13	27	21	23	32
Total at proficient level or above	58	77	71	74	79
<b>Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals</b>					
Percent proficient	42	53	33	48	52
Percent proficient with distinction	9	17	10	17	17
Total at proficient level or above	52	70	43	65	69
<b>Students with special needs</b>					
Percent proficient	13	25	17	9	8
Percent proficient with distinction	0	0	0	0	0
Total at proficient level or above	13	25	17	9	8

‡ Indicates that student subgroup had no members, that the number of members in the subgroup was too small to report, given student privacy considerations, or that data were not available for the school or at the time of posting the information.

NOTE: Totals are based on unrounded estimates.

Source: Vermont Agency of Education, All NECAP Data Files.

**Table 4: Percent of Fair Haven Union High School students who performed at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the NECAP grade 11 mathematics test, by student characteristics: 2009-2013**

Performance Level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>All students</b>					
Percent proficient	25	41	27	26	42
Percent proficient with distinction	1	0	1	1	1
Total at proficient level or above	26	41	28	27	44
<b>Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals</b>					
Percent proficient	9	28	15	17	31
Percent proficient with distinction	3	0	0	2	0
Total at proficient level or above	12	28	15	20	31
<b>Students with special needs</b>					
Percent proficient	7	8	6	9	8
Percent proficient with distinction	0	0	0	0	0
Total at proficient level or above	7	8	6	9	8

‡ Indicates that student subgroup had no members, that the number of members in the subgroup was too small to report, given student privacy considerations, or that data were not available for the school or at the time of posting the information.

NOTE: Totals are based on unrounded estimates.

Source: Vermont Agency of Education, All NECAP Data Files.

**SCHOOL STAFF**

According to the Vermont Agency of Education School Report for 2014-15, the average teacher salary at Fair Haven was \$50,930, which was higher than the average teacher salary for the supervisory union (\$46,844) but lower than the average teacher salary for the state of Vermont (\$56,387).

Generally, little staff turnover exists at Fair Haven Union High School, though some exceptions have occurred. For instance, prior to the arrival of the current principal, who has now been at the school for eight years, the school experienced a great deal of turnover in the principal position. Additionally, while the teaching staff at Fair Haven is very stable, the school recently experienced some turnover due to the retirement of a number of teachers. These recent retirees had decades of experience at the school, and some members of the staff (including current teachers at the school) have taught multiple generations of families in the community.

School staff explain that the supervisory union and school’s approach to filling teaching vacancies has become more school-focused in recent years. That is, a committee that includes a school board member, the principal, faculty members, and a student representative is responsible for choosing new members of the teaching staff. The hiring process includes review of an application, interview, and a sample lesson. While the principal ultimately has the authority to

make a recommendation from among the qualified candidates, input from all members of the panel – including the faculty and student members – weigh heavily in the decision-making process. The principal recommends the choice to the superintendent and school board, who make a final judgment regarding the new staff position.

**Table 5: Staffing at Fair Haven Union High School, 2015-16**

Category	FTE
<b>Administration</b>	
Principal	1.0
Assistant Principal	1.0
Athletic Director	1.0
504 Plan Coordinator	1.0
Administrative Support	5.0
Technical Support	2.0
<b>Main Program</b>	
Core Teachers	24.0
Elective Teachers	10.0
Alternative Program Educator	1.0
Special Education	7.0
Tier 2 Interventionist	1.0
Library/Media Specialist	1.0
<b>Aides</b>	
Para-educators	10.0
Study Hall Monitor	1.0
<b>Pupil Support</b>	
School Counselor	3.0
Social Worker*	1.2
Nurse/Nurse Assistant	2.0
Drug and Alcohol Counselor*	1.0
School Resource Officer (Law Enforcement)*	1.0
In-School Suspension Support	1.0
Custodians and Maintenance Staff	4.0

\*Some school-based personnel are employed by outside entities. Social workers are employed by the state and the drug and alcohol counselor is employed by the state. Local funds provide for the school resource officer.

**Source:** Personal communication with school staff.

Table 5 outlines staff at Fair Haven. In addition to a principal, assistant principal, and athletic director, the school has a number of administrative support personnel, including the principal’s administrative assistant, an attendance secretary, a registrar, an accountant, a special education secretary, and two technical support personnel. Several of these personnel – the principal,

assistant principal, athletic director, and the principal’s administrative assistant – are joined by the head of maintenance and the head of guidance to form an administrative team, which is one of the key decision-making bodies in the school.

Twenty-four teachers are in core subject areas (English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and foreign language), which leads to an average core class size of 18.2 students. The school also employs 10 teachers in elective areas (business, consumer/family science, fine arts, physical education, and driver’s education).

Fair Haven has seven special educators, 10 para-educators, and one Tier 2 interventionist, who focuses exclusively on English language arts. The school has no instructional coaches; while several educators serve as department chairs, these teachers have full teaching loads.<sup>1</sup>

Fair Haven operates an alternative program for students who have had to exit the main instructional program because of extreme circumstances (e.g., substance abuse). One teacher works exclusively with this program, and he coordinates with administrators and teachers to help students create high school completion plans. A small number of students participate in this program.

Fair Haven has a large number of pupil support personnel, some of whom are employed by the school and some of whom are school-based employees of outside agencies. The school has three guidance counselors, a nurse and nurse assistant, and an employee who oversees the in-school suspension room. School-based personnel, whose salaries do not come out of the school budget, also include one full-time social worker and one part-time social worker (for a total of 1.2 FTEs), a drug and alcohol counselor, and a school resource officer. Fair Haven Union High School uses local funds to provide for the school resource officer.

## **GOALS AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

### **Goals**

As noted in the section on the school’s socio-demographic context, Fair Haven Union High School is located in the Addison-Rutland Supervisory Union (ARSU). The ARSU 2015-16 action plan includes goals in the topic areas of (a) academic and behavioral support, (b) comprehensive assessment, (c) high-quality instruction, (d) school-community collaboration, (e) professional development, and (f) technology use. ARSU’s goals include priorities regarding student achievement; according to the action plan, ARSU wants schools to increase overall student performance in reading and mathematics by five percentage points by 2017 and “close the gaps between student subgroups in meeting the state proficiency standards” (p. 3).

School personnel – led by school leadership – have high goals for student performance, and in the words of one staff member, “excellence matters.” The principal articulates that his goal is for the school to be the highest-performing high school in the state of Vermont. To that end, school leadership has prioritized excellence in student performance as measured by the state’s assessments and has set a culture of high expectations for assessment results, particularly on the

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<sup>1</sup> Department chairs receive a stipend for their extra duties.

state assessment. Educators and leaders have worked hard to encourage students to take the state assessment and other academic accomplishments seriously; they have encouraged students to strive for first-place assessment results and have held assemblies for academic excellence.

The school's goals extend beyond excellence in assessment results. For instance, according to school personnel, all of the school's departments have clearly-articulated skills and proficiencies, and educators at Fair Haven expect all students to attain these skills and proficiencies. Additionally, staff members note that school staff share the goal to graduate all students and to increase the number of students who enroll in postsecondary education. Educators at Fair Haven Union High School also endeavor to promote student inquiry, and they report that they value performance over memorization. Fair Haven staff members say that they want students to be able to pose questions and use resources – including modern technology – to collaborate with each other in researching answers to their questions and to present their findings to others.

### **Daily Schedule**

For students, the school day starts at 8:15 am and ends at 3:10 pm. The day is split into eight periods of approximately 45 minutes;<sup>2</sup> fifth period is longer than the other periods to accommodate lunchtime, which lasts approximately 22 minutes. On average, students take about 6.5 classes per day, and many students have at least one study hall period. Additionally, every Wednesday morning, the school has time for teacher advisory periods. While the length of advisory periods has varied from year to year, they last approximately 20 minutes. The purpose of these periods is to build relationships between staff and students, and teachers use advisory periods to mentor students and celebrate accomplishments.

Approximately six years ago, the school decided to increase focus on freshmen and provide these first-year students with extra support as they transitioned from the middle school environment to the high school environment. Part of this increased focus on freshmen included the creation of a freshman academy, and all first-year students are assigned to one of two cohorts within this academy. Students move with each other through core classes in the freshman academy, and all freshmen have a structured study hall period overseen by one of the freshman academy faculty members in addition to core and elective classes.

Teachers' contracted day is seven hours and 45 minutes long and extends from 7:45 am until 3:30 pm. Teachers teach six courses each day. They have one individual planning period and another planning period that is common with others in their department; this common planning time allows for professional learning community (PLC) meetings. The school requires PLCs to meet at least one time per week, but some departments meet more frequently. PLC teams are department-based and include English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, world

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<sup>2</sup> The current 8-period configuration can be considered a modified block schedule, with 8 "skinny" blocks instead of 4 90-minute blocks. School personnel report that school staff are currently in the process of rethinking the structure of the day. The goal of schedule changes would be to increase the amount of time students spend in each class. Staff members have not formalized a new schedule plan, but it is likely that the new plan will call for class period lengths that fall between the current length (45 minutes) and a block schedule length (90 minutes). Staff perceive that a class length of approximately 60 minutes will allow educators and students to delve more deeply into class material.

language, business, fine arts, special education, and health/wellness (including educators of physical education, family/consumer science, driver's education, and nurses).

While department PLC teams are the main teacher organizational structure, teachers at Fair Haven Union High School are also organized into interdepartmental teams, which meet during faculty meeting time and provide guidance for school-wide decisions. Teachers who work with first-year students are also on freshman teams, which comprise teachers of four core subject areas (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies). Freshman teams meet twice per week to create lesson plans, share materials, and discuss student progress.

## **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM**

### **Curriculum**

In order to graduate, students at Fair Haven Union High School are required to take:

- 4 credits of English language arts,
- 3 credits of mathematics,
- 3 credits of science,
- 4 credits of social studies and/or history,
- 3 credits of physical education,
- 1 credit in either technology education or family/consumer science, and
- 1.5 credits in fine arts.<sup>3</sup>

The required freshman and sophomore English language arts classes rely on teacher-developed curriculum, which is shared across all teachers who instruct the courses. The year-long courses cover topics such as folktales, poetry, Shakespeare, epics, legends, and novels. In addition to these required courses, Fair Haven Union High School offers courses in British and American literature (including honors offerings in these topics) and Advanced Placement courses, as well as a variety of semester-long courses on English language arts elective topics. Teachers of English language arts do not rely on textbooks; rather, they choose materials that align with the focus of each course. Teachers work as a team to develop common materials that are shared across sections of the same course, and they also have the same or similar assessments and assignments across course sections. English teachers report that, whenever possible, they use common lesson plans, curricular materials, assignments, and assessments.

Teachers in the mathematics department offer a variety of courses, including prealgebra, algebra I, geometry, algebra II, precalculus, calculus (including AP calculus), and probability/statistics. In previous years, math teachers have used many different textbooks, but during the 2015-16 year, they have shifted to the use of the Engage New York curriculum. While teachers of the prealgebra course do use supplemental materials, teachers of other courses say that they do not supplement as much as they used to and that they mainly use materials from the Engage New

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<sup>3</sup> Staff at Fair Haven Union High School describe current efforts to implement the personalized learning plans (PLPs) that are required under Vermont's Act 77 of 2013: Flexible Pathways Initiative. PLPs, in conjunction with moves toward proficiency-based grading and other elements of the law, may impact the ways in which educators at Fair Haven Union High School and other high schools throughout the state approach curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

York curriculum. Math teachers at the school already share many assessment materials and report that they are currently using PLC time to work toward greater use of common mathematics assessments. They also use PLC time to create and refine lesson plans.

In general, students at Fair Haven Union High School are required to take earth and physical science as freshmen and biology as sophomores. Science educators also offer courses in chemistry, physics, engineering, horticulture, environmental science, and Advanced Placement science classes. Most science teachers in the school use textbooks, though they report that they all supplement texts with outside materials, particularly for laboratory exercises. The teachers describe their curriculum as “lab heavy,” and they explain that they all use lab protocols and rubrics that the science department teachers developed together. Science teachers also report that they have increasingly begun to share lesson plans when possible. They use similar curricular materials and teacher-developed assessments (which include both teacher-developed items and textbook items)<sup>4</sup> but allow for teacher-specific variation. Fair Haven science teachers say that they have a curricular “framework” but that “autonomy [is] built into the framework.”

Two social studies courses are required for Fair Haven Union High students: United States history until 1877 and modern United States history from 1877 to the present. Social studies teachers offer a range of additional courses in both history (including Advanced Placement history courses) and the behavioral sciences (including courses in psychology and sociology). Curriculum within the social studies department is teacher-created. When possible, teachers share lesson plans, curricular materials, and assessments, but teachers report that sharing is easier at the lower levels (especially at the freshman level), where the school offers more sections of the same course.

## **Instruction**

As noted above in the section on school goals, administrators and teachers at Fair Haven Union High School value inquiry and attempt to encourage students to pose questions and perform their own research to answer those questions. Given that shared prioritization of inquiry, many staff members report that they use instructional strategies designed to help students achieve those aims. For instance, some teachers use project-based assignments in order to ensure that students have an opportunity to move from questioning to research to presentation of findings. Additionally, due to resources like a one-to-one computer initiative and a recently-modernized library/media center, many teachers have begun to integrate technology into instruction so that students have the ability to use multiple tools as they engage in their research activities.

Additionally, as is also noted above in the section on school goals, administrators and teachers at Fair Haven Union High School want to see continual improvement in the school’s assessment results. Therefore, to varying degrees throughout the different departments in the school, teachers have focused instruction on assessed materials. For instance, for many years, science teachers have made conscious efforts to ensure that their students would be prepared to take the NECAP science exam. Additionally, at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, English language arts teachers took the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) exam themselves at the beginning of the year so that they would understand what the experience would

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<sup>4</sup>According to science teachers, some courses rely on lab projects in lieu of exams.

be like for their students, and then they created lesson plans that would help students prepare for the new assessment format and content.

## **Assessments**

Especially since the arrival of the current principal eight years ago, educators have shifted toward an increased awareness of data. School staff describe a teacher-led and administrator-supported effort to analyze data (especially NECAP data) to inform what they should teach and when, what areas of the curriculum needed to be strengthened, and what areas of the curriculum were thorough and did not need further attention. Staff members also describe efforts to encourage students to take the assessments seriously; these efforts include pep rallies focused on assessments and academic achievement as well as discussions among students and school leaders regarding the importance of strong assessment results.

Teachers at Fair Haven Union High School have a variety of resources in their efforts to use data to inform instruction. First, the supervisory union employs a data coach, who helps teachers think through issues of data use, data reliability, and data validity. Second, the teachers have access to the assessments themselves and the resulting student data. Assessments include summative assessments (the NECAP and SBAC), screeners (all incoming students take the Scholastic Reading Inventory and the Scholastic Mathematics Inventory), and benchmark exams (students take the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) assessments three times a year during their freshman and sophomore years). Teachers use collaborative planning time to analyze these data, along with information from course-based exams and students' quarterly grades, to make decisions about lesson plans, curriculum, and instruction.

## **Academic Interventions**

Fair Haven Union High School has a wide range of both informal and formal interventions for struggling students.

For instance, in terms of informal interventions, teachers describe that when they notice a student beginning to struggle, they first talk with the student in an attempt to identify the problem. They try to accommodate the student and provide extra resources so the student is able to complete required work. Some teachers hold afterschool homework sessions for struggling students. In addition to individual teachers' homework sessions, the school offers a whole-school afterschool homework success program that is accompanied by a late bus service and, when possible, food. This program is open to any student who wishes to participate. Students who participate in an extracurricular activity<sup>5</sup> and are failing two classes or have an average grade below 70 percent are required to participate in the homework success program for at least 10 days before they are able to participate in their extracurricular activity again. School staff report that students take this requirement seriously and that coaches and other extracurricular leaders are supportive of students' participation in the afterschool program.

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<sup>5</sup> The school offers between 20 and 30 extracurricular activities, and staff report that a majority of students in the school participate in at least one activity.

When students are struggling and these informal and afterschool opportunities do not provide sufficient support, they have access to additional resources within the school day. For instance, struggling students are enrolled in an extra guided study hall period, which is used for Tier 2 interventions. English language arts intervention programs include System 44, Read 180, Wilson reading, and Framing Your Thoughts. Math intervention programs include Do the Math Now, Excel math, Odyssey math, and Math 180. Mathematics instructors also describe the prealgebra class as an intervention for struggling students.

Educators at Fair Haven Union High School, like educators throughout the state of Vermont, can also put educational support team (EST) plans into place in order to create formal plans for struggling students, regardless of whether or not the students have an IEP or a 504 plan. These plans could include a variety of supports and remain in place for as long as needed.

Special educators at Fair Haven attempt to provide necessary services to students without removing them from the general education environment. While educators practice a co-teaching model (i.e., one class that has both a general educator and a special educator) in limited instances, this is not a common approach to the delivery of special education services. Rather, special educators focus on push-in supports and, when possible, they engage in strategic assignment of students so that groups of students are in the same classroom and can receive targeted support from special educators. In a small number of cases, students with high needs require assistance mastering life skills. These students can receive instruction in a wide range of skills, from personal hygiene to skills that will help them participate in society (e.g., grocery shopping).

### **Behavioral Interventions**

The assistant principal is responsible for student discipline. The assistant principal, along with many other staff members in the school, prioritizes relationship-building with students and parents and views this effort as the foundation of an approach to behavior management at the school. The goal of addressing behavior issues is to “prepare mature human beings,” so the assistant principal wants students to understand the consequences of their decisions within the framework of a relationship built on respect and understanding.

Educators at Fair Haven Union High School have a number of resources to help students with both ongoing and sporadic behavior and discipline challenges. First, when students consistently struggle with discipline, educators can create an EST plan to address behavior issues, because EST plans are not limited to academic issues. Second, the school operates the Annex program, which provides resources for students who have excelled academically as well as allows students who have struggled to succeed in a traditional high school environment an opportunity. Teachers associated with the Annex program make personalized plans for students to help them successfully complete the high school program of study. Finally, the school staff includes a school resource officer, a law enforcement official charged with addressing attendance and behavior issues.

## **Professional Development**

Teachers at Fair Haven Union High School engage in school-based, district-based, and individually-driven professional development.

School-based professional development occurs both within and outside the school day. As noted above in the section on the school schedule, teachers have one common planning period during the school day that they share with departmental colleagues. They use this collaborative planning time at least one time per week to meet in departmental PLCs, and some staff meet more frequently than once per week. Additionally, members of freshman teams engage in collaborative planning at least twice per week. Furthermore, the school holds faculty meetings each Tuesday after school; these meetings are used for a variety of purposes including professional development led by department chairs and meetings of interdepartmental teams, which provide faculty feedback on school-wide initiatives.

District-sponsored professional development mainly focuses on district initiatives, but some district professional development involves opportunities for cross-school curricular collaboration. For instance, a few years ago, the district curriculum coordinators organized opportunities for teachers at all of the district's schools to meet with their departmental colleagues to discuss matters related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.

Finally, the district provides teachers resources that they can use to engage in graduate courses and professional conferences, and staff at Fair Haven report that many teachers take advantage of these outside opportunities.

## **School Culture**

The school has a results-focused, professional, and collaborative culture, where school staff throughout the building work to improve student performance in the classroom and on state assessments. Fair Haven educators work together to develop common curriculum and lesson plans, and teachers employ a common approach to instruction that emphasizes inquiry. According to school staff, recent stability in the principal position has contributed to this positive school culture. School personnel say, too, that school administrators trust the professionalism of the faculty and that teachers have both autonomy and support for their work.

School staff members also report that the school culture encourages students to take control of and responsibility for their learning environment, and that students consistently take ownership of their learning and actively assist their peers. For instance, administrators turned control over school assemblies to students, who now have the authority to select the content and structure of whole-school gatherings. Students chose to widen participation in assemblies to more students and students who otherwise might not have received school-wide recognition for success. Assemblies honor athletes as well as musicians, scholars, and students who value other pursuits (such as meteorology, in one notable case).

The school also has relationships with the surrounding community. Fair Haven Union High School is a multi-generational school; many members of the faculty and staff attended the school. Staff consistently note that the school has excellent community support, which manifests as school pride and fiscal support. Teachers explain that although the community is not wealthy, people will “stretch” to support the school. The community consistently approves the school budget and supports the use of tax dollars for education.

## **SUMMARY**

This report describes the teaching and learning environment at Fair Haven Union High School. At this school, the following conditions exist:

**A clear focus on improving student performance.** Administrators and teachers emphasize student performance and make sure that staff and students alike prioritize assessments. The school principal has encouraged students to take assessments seriously and has made conscious efforts to reward not only students’ extracurricular achievements but also their curricular and assessment successes. Teachers lead the effort to use student performance data to inform decisions about curriculum and instruction, and school administrators support that effort. In order to do this work, educators at Fair Haven Union High access resources such as assessments, assessment results, and time.

**Emphasis on core subjects.** Fair Haven requires all students to take four credits in English language arts, three credits in mathematics, three credits in science, and four credits in social studies. In some cases, students take common courses (e.g., freshman students take the same English language arts, science, and social studies courses). This practice allows teachers to create common curriculum and assessments. Additionally, the school offers a variety of Tier 2 interventions for students who struggle to grasp core content in the Tier 1 setting, and the school also offers an afterschool program – with transportation – so that students can receive additional help outside of school hours.

**Teacher collaboration.** Within their departmental professional learning communities, teachers work together to tweak curriculum, discuss successful instructional strategies, create common assessments (both rubric-based and exam-based), and discuss student progress. Teachers also work with each other on a monthly basis in interdepartmental teams, where teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with their non-departmental colleagues on matters of interest to the entire school.

**Professional school culture.** Fair Haven Union High School has a results-focused, collaborative culture, where administrators and teachers alike recognize and support educator professionalism. Teachers work as a team to develop and implement a common curriculum, with common curriculum units and assessments. Throughout the school, educators employ a common approach to instruction that emphasizes inquiry in all subjects.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH THE EVIDENCE-BASED MODEL**

The case of Fair Haven High Union High school illustrates ways in which school practices are similar to the Evidence-Based (EB) model and ways in which practices differ. The following paragraphs highlight several similarities and differences.

### **Staffing**

In many ways, staffing at Fair Haven Union High School is at higher levels than the EB model recommends. The average core class size (18.2 students) is slightly lower than that of the EB model (20 students), which requires more core teachers than the EB model provides. Additionally, the ratio of elective to core teachers is higher than the EB model (41.7 percent vs. 33.3 percent). Moreover, the school has higher numbers of administrators, special educators, school counselors, and para-educators than the EB model. In other ways, however, staffing at Fair Haven is at lower levels than the EB model. For example, the school has no non-teaching instructional coaches, and while the school does have one Tier 2 interventionist, the EB model would provide resources for one more.

### **High Goals**

The EB model recommends that educators set high goals for students – a practice that is clear at Fair Haven. School staff report that they want the school to be the highest-performing high school in the state and that they want every student to graduate, and they consistently make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and school culture in efforts to bring these goals to fruition.

### **Focus on Tier 1 and Tier 2 Curriculum and Instruction**

In numerous ways, educators at Fair Haven encourage students to get a firm grasp on core material, the key focus of the EB model. First, the school requires that all students take 4 credits of English language arts, 3 credits of mathematics, 3 credits of science, and 4 credits of social studies and/or history.

Second, the school has increased its focus on freshmen; first-year students, who often face challenges in the transition from the middle school environment to a high school setting, are organized into one of two cohorts and have targeted resources and support.

Third, educators at Fair Haven invest a great deal of time and energy in the main instructional program. Teachers assist each other in lesson planning. They also share curricular materials, assignment ideas, and items for assessment. Across the school, educators and leaders report that they aim to prepare students to do well on assessments but also to engage in inquiry and to become critical thinkers.

Finally, Fair Haven has a number of resources for students who struggle to master content in a Tier 1 setting. The school uses several interventions in both English language arts and mathematics, which allow struggling students to receive additional instruction during the school

day. Fair Haven also leverages extracurricular activities to improve students' academic outcomes; the school has an afterschool program open to all students, but students who participate in extracurricular programs are required to take advantage of the extra help offered at this program if their grades fall below a certain level.

### **Data-based Decision-making**

Educators at Fair Haven are serious about using data to foster school improvement. Staff describe a teacher-led and administrator-supported effort to use assessment information to inform curriculum and instruction and to determine when students need additional support. While the school aligns with the EB model in terms of attitudes toward student performance information and access to many types of assessment data, Fair Haven Union High School could align more closely with the EB model if its educators had access to more formative assessment data.

### **Collaboration Among Staff**

Fair Haven teachers have multiple opportunities for collaboration. Teachers in the school are organized into department teams, and teachers within each team have a common planning period and are required to meet at least once per week for collaborative planning. Teachers report that they meet even more frequently than that, which aligns with the EB model, which provides resources for daily common planning time and recommends that professional learning communities meet at least three times per week. Within departmental teams, teachers share materials, lesson plans, assignments, and assessments with each other. In addition to departmental teams, teachers at Fair Haven are organized into interdepartmental teams, where they work with colleagues after school at faculty meeting times on issues that impact the school-wide community.

### **Leadership**

The EB model calls for “dense leadership,” where strong administrators empower educators throughout the school to engage in high-quality curricular and instructional practices. Staff at Fair Haven describe a teacher-led, administrator-supported effort to engage in data-based decision making. This practice clearly aligns with dense leadership and demonstrates that both administrators and teachers take responsibility for instructional improvement.

In sum, while there are ways in which practices at Fair Haven do not completely align with the EB model, educators at Fair Haven Union High School have used resources in ways that align with the EB model. Specifically, staffing at in many areas in Fair Haven is higher than the EB model, but the school's staffing resources are low in two areas deemed critical by the EB model: instructional coaches and Tier 2 interventionists. However, the school's clear focus on core subjects, collaborative teacher work, use of a common curriculum in courses, and responsibility for student performance results is highly aligned with the EB model.