



## **Oak Grove Elementary School: Case of a Vermont Improving School**

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*Using the Evidence-Based Method to  
Identify Adequate Spending Levels for Vermont Schools*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oak Grove Elementary School, part of the Brattleboro Town School District and Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU), is the smallest elementary school in Brattleboro, Vermont. In 2014-15, the school enrolled 110 students in kindergarten through grade 6. Most of the students at Oak Grove are White, and in 2014-15, thirty-one percent of the students at Oak Grove were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In recent years, Oak Grove has posted remarkable improvements in student achievement in both reading and mathematics. In reading, from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of Oak Grove students who scored at either the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) exam increased by 21 points, from 70 percent to 91 percent. In mathematics, the percentage of students at Oak Grove who scored at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels increased by 29 points, from 53 percent to 82 percent.

This report describes the context in which these gains occurred. At Oak Grove, the following conditions permeate the school:

**Common curriculum.** In recent years, educators at Oak Grove and throughout the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union have made changes in their curricular approach, especially in English language arts and mathematics. Specifically, Oak Grove educators adopted a common school-wide curriculum, with a phonics emphasis in English language arts and problem-solving focus in mathematics.

**Multiple supports for struggling students.** Educators at Oak Grove take implementation of the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model seriously and have the resources necessary to implement this model with fidelity. For instance, Oak Grove teachers have access to benchmark data and support in analyzing these data from the supervisory union, and they use this student performance information to place students into skills-based intervention groups. Oak Grove educators also have time to provide students in these groups with sustained interventions; they embed time for intervention into the school day four to five times per week, and struggling students receive Tier 2 instruction from a variety of school personnel, including credentialed tutors.

**Teacher collaboration and data-based decision making.** All staff meet twice per month to discuss issues that impact the entire school, and teachers meet in vertical teams two times each month to collaborate on matters of curriculum, instruction, and lesson planning. In each of these endeavors, educators rely on student performance data from multiple assessments – to which they have access through real-time data management systems that allow them to review student information at any time – to inform their work.

**Consistent and sustained support from the supervisory union.** Oak Grove does not have instructional coaches at the school site, but WSESU employs a full-time literacy coach and a part-time math coach in addition to a full-time literacy curriculum coordinator and a part-time math curriculum coordinator. These central office personnel provide coaching and support to Oak Grove teachers throughout the school year; the literacy coach, in particular, is often in the school at least once per week.

## **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 school's socio-demographic context, 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 supervisory union and school staff (school administrators, instructional staff, and support staff) that occurred in October 2015.

## **SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT**

Oak Grove Elementary School is located in Brattleboro, Vermont, close to the borders of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Oak Grove is the smallest of three elementary schools in the Brattleboro Town School District and is part of the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU), which includes 9 schools and a regional career center. The school's community has families from both high-income and low-income backgrounds, and parents' jobs include careers in education (both in K-12 settings and at the School of International Training, which has both undergraduate and graduate programs), healthcare, trades, and the service sector. Brattleboro is also home to the Brattleboro Retreat, a center dedicated to helping people overcome trauma and drug abuse.

Oak Grove is a neighborhood school, and most of its students can walk or ride their bikes to campus. School staff describe a busy playground before and after school, where parents and children gather to play and spend time with each other.

Oak Grove is a small school with only one class per grade level (Table 1). According to data from the Vermont Agency of Education, enrollment at Oak Grove has declined over time: in 2008-09, enrollment was 146 students and in 2014-15, enrollment was 110.<sup>1</sup> According to school staff, 122 students attend Oak Grove in the 2015-16 school year.

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<sup>1</sup> While information from the Windham County enrollment report also provides student counts for a prekindergarten program, the prekindergarten program operates separately from the school.

**Table 1: Oak Grove Elementary School class sizes, 2014-15**

Grade Level	Class Size
K	13
1	18
2	21
3	16
4	14
5	15
6	13
All grade average	15.7

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

Over three-quarters of the students at Oak Grove are White (Table 2). In 2014-15, thirty-one percent of the students at Oak Grove were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. A smaller proportion of the school’s students had special needs (8 percent). Oak Grove’s student population does not include many or any English language learner (ELL) students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Academy School, also located in Brattleboro, provides services to ELL students. This series of reports on improving schools in Vermont includes a report on Academy School.

**Table 2: Oak Grove Elementary School student characteristics, 2014-15**

Student Characteristics	Percentage of Student Population
Race/ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	‡
Asian	1
Black/African American	3
Hispanic/Latino	3
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	‡
Two or more races	6
White	87
Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	31
English language learners	‡
Students with special needs	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: Demographic data include information for the prekindergarten program, which is included in the school report but functions apart from the school. The remainder of this report focuses exclusively on students in kindergarten through grade 6. Students with special needs include students with an IEP or a 504 plan. It *excludes* students with an EST plan.

**Source:** Vermont Agency of Education, School Report for Oak Grove Elementary School: 2014-15.

**STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

Oak Grove has posted remarkable improvements in student performance from 2009 to 2013.

In *reading* (Table 3), from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of Oak Grove students who scored at either the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) exam increased by 21 points for all students and 27 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Additionally, the percentage of students who scored at the proficient with distinction level in reading grew by 19 points for all students and 15 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Table 3: Percent of Oak Grove Elementary School students who performed at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the NECAP grades 3-8 reading test, by student characteristics: 2009-2013**

Performance Level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>All students</b>					
Percent proficient	58	49	45	46	60
Percent proficient with distinction	12	18	26	28	31
Total at proficient level or above	70	68	71	73	91
<b>Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals</b>					
Percent proficient	62	57	50	58	74
Percent proficient with distinction	4	7	13	15	19
Total at proficient level or above	66	64	63	73	93
<b>Students with special needs</b>					
Percent proficient	38	7	35	31	‡
Percent proficient with distinction	0	0	0	0	‡
Total at proficient level or above	38	7	35	31	‡
<b>White students</b>					
Percent proficient	58	49	45	‡	‡
Percent proficient with distinction	12	18	24	‡	‡
Total at proficient level or above	70	67	69	‡	‡

‡ 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. Proficiency results are not presented for English language learners (ELLs), Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, or students of two or more races due to small numbers of these students in the school.

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

In *mathematics* (Table 4), the percentage of students at Oak Grove who scored at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels increased 29 points for all students and 36 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Additionally, the percentage of students in the proficient with distinction category in mathematics increased by 12 points for all students and 15 points for students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Table 4: Percent of Oak Grove Elementary School students who performed at the proficient or proficient with distinction levels on the NECAP grades 3-8 mathematics test, by student characteristics: 2009-2013**

Performance Level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>All students</b>					
Percent proficient	34	39	48	51	51
Percent proficient with distinction	19	17	18	27	31
Total at proficient level or above	53	56	66	77	82
<b>Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals</b>					
Percent proficient	32	47	53	58	52
Percent proficient with distinction	11	7	5	15	26
Total at proficient level or above	43	53	58	73	79
<b>Students with special needs</b>					
Percent proficient	24	7	41	44	‡
Percent proficient with distinction	5	7	0	6	‡
Total at proficient level or above	29	14	41	50	‡
<b>White students</b>					
Percent proficient	37	38	46	‡	‡
Percent proficient with distinction	20	18	19	‡	‡
Total at proficient level or above	57	56	65	‡	‡

‡ 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. Proficiency results are not presented for English language learners (ELLs), Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, or students of two or more races due to small numbers of students who took the assessment.

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

**SCHOOL STAFF**

According to information from the Vermont Agency of Education, the average teacher salary for Oak Grove in 2013-14 was \$54,133, which was lower than the average teacher salary for both the supervisory union (\$57,696) and the state of Vermont as a whole (\$56,387).

Staff turnover in the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union overall and Oak Grove in particular is relatively low; district and school leaders are “careful about who [is hired], because they stay.” While Oak Grove has a new principal for the 2015-16 school year, this leader has had other roles in the district and the staff of the school has been relatively stable across time. Table 5, below, outlines the staff at Oak Grove in 2015-16. As the table and corresponding text illuminate, Oak

Grove has, as one staff member described, “a lot of manpower” to provide instruction and support for students.

**Table 5. Staffing at Oak Grove Elementary School, 2015-16**

Category	FTE
<b>Administration</b>	
Principal	1.0
Secretary/Administrative Support	1.0
<b>Main Program</b>	
Core Teachers	7.0
Elective Teachers	1.8
Special Education Self-Contained	2.0
Special Education	2.0
Interventionists/Academic Support	3.0
Library Media Specialist	1.0
<b>Aides</b>	
Para-educators (General Education Program)	5.7
Para-educators (Special Education Self-Contained)	3.0
<b>Pupil Support</b>	
School Counselor	1.0
School-based Clinician/Social Worker	0.6
Speech/Language Pathologist	0.7
Nurse	1.0
Behavior Intervention Specialist	1.0
Other Behavioral Pupil Support	1.0
Custodians and Maintenance Staff	2.0

Note: Special education and speech/language staff work at the school level but are employees of the supervisory union. The school-based clinician is an employee of an external health organization.

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

As outlined in Table 5, Oak Grove has seven classroom teachers – one for each grade in the school – and several elective teachers who split their time between Oak Grove and other schools in the supervisory union (which accounts for the partial FTE in the table above). Classroom teachers are organized into vertical teams: one team for kindergarten and grade 1, a second team for grades 2 and 3, and a third team for grades 4, 5, and 6.

These classroom teachers receive support from six para-educators, two of whom work on slightly less than a full-time basis (which accounts for the partial FTE in the table above). A number of the school’s para-educators are highly-educated; for instance, some para-educators have teaching credentials and one is pursuing a master’s degree. For the most part, each grade has support

from one para-educator, but for the 2015-16 academic year, one para-educator works with grades 4 and 5.

Two special educators provide support for students with special needs who participate in the general education setting, three staff members are dedicated to providing Tier 2 intervention services for struggling students, and one library/media specialist serves the entire school.

Some students at Oak Grove have particularly high needs. While school staff are working on integrating these students into the general education setting more fully than they have been in past years, these students participate in an intensive program that is staffed by two teachers (one for kindergarten through grade 3 and another for grades 4-6) and three para-educators.

Multiple staff members at Oak Grove provide additional pupil support; most of these staff members focus on students' social and emotional health. The school has a counselor, a behavior specialist who is assisted by a behavior support para-educator, a nurse, and a school-based social worker who comes to the school three days per week. A speech and language pathologist also works at the school three and a half days each week.

The school does not have any dedicated, non-teaching instructional coaches. However, the supervisory union has a full-time literacy coach and a part-time math coach, and teachers at Oak Grove report that they can call upon these central office officials (particularly the literacy coach, who is able to dedicate all of his time to coaching work) for instructional support, including help with analyzing and using student data and observation and feedback on lessons.<sup>3</sup> The school also has multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) teacher leaders who have extra responsibilities associated with professional development and curriculum planning. However, these teachers carry full-time teaching loads, so their responsibilities as leaders come in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

## **GOALS AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATION**

### **Goals**

The Windham Southeast Supervisory Union maintains an action plan with three main goals: (1) have safe and healthy schools; (2) improve student learning; and (3) increase educator, parent, and student leadership in the system. In terms of student learning, WSESU has a goal to “decrease [the] achievement gap by 10 points on the NECAP results” and another goal to “increase Special Education student participation in general education classrooms to 80 percent pK-12.”

Oak Grove's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) fits within the umbrella of the WSESU action plan and includes the same goals of improved school climate, student performance, and family

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<sup>3</sup> As is also noted in the report on Academy School, the level of instructional coach support from the supervisory union has decreased over time. When the supervisory union had American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds, the central office had a full-time data coach, a full-time math coach, and a full-time literacy coach, in addition to mathematics and literacy curriculum coordinators. At the time of this report, the supervisory union has a part-time data coach, a part-time math coach, and a full-time literacy coach, in addition to a part-time mathematics curriculum coordinator and a full-time literacy curriculum coordinator.

engagement. At Oak Grove, academic and behavioral goals stem from the MTSS model, whereby the school aims to improve student achievement in both English language arts and mathematics by focusing on data-based decision-making, proper Tier 1 instruction, Tier 2 supports for struggling students, and programs that support positive behaviors for students across the school. Every two weeks, leaders from multiple committees – which focus on topics that range from academics to behavior – meet to discuss progress on school improvement.

### **Daily Schedule**

The student school day at Oak Grove starts at 8:15 am and ends at 2:45 pm. According to WSESU policy, elementary students are expected to receive 90 minutes of English language arts instruction each day and 70 minutes of mathematics instruction (which can be structured as a 60-minute block at one part of the day and a 10-minute block at another part of the day). School staff confirmed that teachers at Oak Grove adhere to the supervisory union’s time allocation guidelines and, generally, Oak Grove teachers’ English language arts and mathematics lessons last 45 to 60 minutes at a time. Also, students receive approximately 40-45 minutes of electives each day and 50 minutes daily for lunch and recess. Students have skills block, a time for Tier 2 intervention in either English language arts or mathematics, for 35-45 minutes four to five times per week. The amount of time that students receive instruction in social studies and science varies across grades, from approximately 30 minutes three times per week to 45 minutes daily.

The WSESU teacher contract week includes 37.5 hours a week, for an average of seven hours and 30 minutes of teacher contract time each day. Oak Grove teachers start their day between 7:45 am and 8:00 am. Classroom teachers have planning time when their students are at electives, and they have a duty-free period while the para-educators are supervising their students during lunch and recess.

Twice per week, the school allocates time to character education and school-wide community engagement. Each week, all teachers engage the students in their classrooms in Monday morning meeting, where teachers deliver lessons that focus on one of the school’s four guiding principles (be respectful; be responsible; be safe; be kind). These lessons range from 20 to 45 minutes. Every Wednesday morning, the school holds an assembly called All School Sing. This assembly, which is frequently attended by parents and other community members, lasts for approximately 30 minutes and is a time for students and staff members to gather together, share accomplishments, and participate in music and dance activities.

### **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM**

The Windham Southeast Supervisory Union attempts to provide guidance and support for its schools in terms of appropriate curriculum and instruction for students across the supervisory union, and it employs curriculum coordinators and instructional coaches to assist with school-level implementation of high-quality curriculum and instruction. Despite support for consistency in curriculum and instruction across the supervisory union, leaders in the central office are open to reasonable change that improves outcomes for students.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Supervisory union and school personnel note that, in the immediate wake of the transition to the Common Core, some degree of variation existed in mathematics curriculum. The purpose of this variation was to determine what

## **Curriculum**

Prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, Vermont had state standards for multiple content areas, including English language arts, mathematics, social studies, health, science, and foreign language. Vermont has adopted the Common Core; consequently, the Common Core standards serve as the framework for curriculum in English language arts and mathematics. Additionally, Vermont has adopted the Next Generation Science Standards, which now provide a framework upon which science curriculum can be built. In general, curricula for other subjects, such as social studies, align with existing Vermont state standards. The following paragraphs detail how WSESU and Oak Grove implement these curricula.

WSESU employs two staff members who coordinate curriculum across the supervisory union: a full-time literacy curriculum coordinator and a mathematics curriculum coordinator who also has mathematics coaching responsibilities. These central office staff attempt to help educators in the district balance autonomy with consistent, high-quality curriculum across the supervisory union.

In English language arts, over the past several years, the supervisory union curriculum has evolved from school-specific whole language approaches to a more standardized phonics-based curriculum. At the time of the shift to a phonics approach, which educators believed would more effectively help students in the supervisory union learn to read, the supervisory union adopted the Foundations text. Recently, it has added Reading Street curriculum as well. Oak Grove teachers rely on these Foundations and Reading Street materials for instruction in English language arts.

In mathematics, schools across the supervisory union previously used the Investigations series, a problem-based curriculum, for kindergarten through grade 5 and Connected Math materials for grade 6. Amid the shift to the Common Core, teachers are experimenting with math curricular materials in an effort to align curriculum with the new standards. Many teachers at Oak Grove have begun to rely on the Engage New York materials for mathematics instruction.

Curricula in social studies and science are more fluid, and school staff report that they do not have standardized texts for these subjects. Teachers find their own materials for these subjects. Because Oak Grove has only one class section per grade, teachers often do not have the opportunity to share materials with each other, but they try to re-use materials, as appropriate, from year to year.

## **Instruction**

As noted above in the section on the school schedule, teachers spend 90 minutes on English language arts and 60 minutes on mathematics. Teachers at Oak Grove report that they use a variety of instructional approaches, including combinations of whole-class instruction and

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mathematics curriculum would align well with the Common Core and work well for their students. The goal was that this period of variation would lead to a choice of a common curriculum that would eventually be implemented throughout the supervisory union. At the time of data collection, most educators in the school relied on Engage New York materials for mathematics.

independent practice, small-group instruction, and thinking maps and other visual representations of concepts. They also engage in project-based instruction when it is possible and appropriate. Teachers try to integrate technology into lessons, as well: the school has mp3 players for kindergarteners, tablets for students in grade 2, and laptops for students in grades 3 through 6.

## **Assessments**

The Windham Southeast Supervisory Union emphasizes the use of data from multiple assessments to inform instruction.<sup>5</sup> The supervisory union began to focus increased attention on data-based decision-making several years ago, when it used American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds to hire a full-time data coach. While the supervisory union no longer has the resources to employ a full-time data coach, the groundwork laid by the data coach remains. Based on the work of the data coach and other central office personnel, educators across the supervisory union now have access to a variety of resources, including a data management system (GoogleDocs) that allows for real-time, shared access to student performance data. The supervisory union also maintains an Assessment Toolkit document that outlines the supervisory union's approach to assessment, provides an overview of the suite of assessments that it expects schools within the supervisory union to utilize, and details the timelines and other requirements for assessment of students within the supervisory union.

According to the Assessment Toolkit, elementary grade students take a variety of assessments throughout the academic year, including:

- multiple types of AIMSWeb literacy assessments,
- the Quick Phonics Screener,
- the Spelling Inventory,
- the Phonological Awareness Test,
- the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System,
- running records of student reading,
- end of unit tests in literacy,
- multiple types of AIMSWeb mathematics assessments,
- interview-based mathematics assessments (including the Primary Number and Operations Assessment, Assessing Math Concepts; teacher-developed Concrete-Representational-Abstract assessments; the Mathematics Reasoning Inventory; and the Numeracy Project Assessment),
- end of unit tests in mathematics, and
- summative state assessments (formerly the NECAP; now the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test).

In decisions about curriculum and instruction, Oak Grove staff report that they rely, in particular, on data from teacher-administered AIMSWeb, which they get from student assessments that occur three times each year. Other assessments that are commonly used at Oak Grove include

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<sup>5</sup> Academy School, another school in the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, is another improving school included in this series of reports. The information in this section that pertains to the supervisory union is repeated in that report.

unit tests from the Reading Street and Foundations literacy curricula as well as mathematics unit tests, which used to align with the Investigations curriculum but now align with Engage New York materials.

The use of data to inform instruction is important to Oak Grove educators. The school's continuous improvement plan focuses heavily on teachers' use of data, and school personnel meet regularly to discuss student performance. For instance, central office personnel come to school three times a year to engage in intensive analysis of AIMSWeb data. Members of school leadership committees meet twice a month to discuss student data and determine how they should be used in plans for overall school improvement. Additionally, Oak Grove teachers meet weekly at either staff meetings or vertical team meetings (discussed in more detail below in the section on professional development), during which they analyze student performance information.

### **Academic Interventions**

The primary intervention for struggling students at Oak Grove is skills block, which meets four to five times a week for 35-45 minutes. Teachers assign students to English language arts or mathematics intervention groups based on student performance data, especially AIMSWeb data. Multiple educators, including Tier 2 interventionists, classroom teachers, special educators, para-educators, the school librarian, and the speech and language pathologist, work with groups of students to bolster skills in areas that students struggle. The size of intervention groups varies across grade and skill, but groups include about five to six students each. Students who do not require Tier 2 intervention use this time to participate in enrichment groups.

Like all schools in Vermont, Oak Grove puts educational support team (EST) plans into place for students who consistently struggle to perform, regardless of whether or not these students have an IEP or a 504 plan. These plans outline the particular resources that individual students will need to ensure that they succeed in the academic environment.

Students at Oak Grove also have access to a summer school program that takes place at a different school in the supervisory union. Oak Grove teachers can recommend summer school for particular students, but parents have the authority to decide whether or not to enroll their students in summer school.

### **Behavioral and Social-Emotional Interventions**

One way that staff at Oak Grove try to address behavior issues is to promote positive behavior and avoid negative behavior in the first place. To that end, Oak Grove implements the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model. In the past, students received individual PBIS rewards for demonstrating positive behavior, but the school is increasingly moving toward collective (e.g., classroom-wide) rewards for positive behavior. In addition to PBIS, the school allocates time each week for Monday morning lessons, which focus on teacher-developed curriculum centered on the four guiding principles of the school – respect, responsibility, safety, and kindness.

In instances where behavior challenges become an issue, Oak Grove has multiple behavioral supports for students. As noted above in the section on staff, the school has multiple personnel who are qualified to provide social-emotional assistance to students. The school also has a dedicated space that serves as a behavior room, which is a place where students can go when they need breaks from the general education setting or that school staff can utilize when there is a behavior crisis.

Furthermore, the state of Vermont promotes the use of ESTs for students who need additional resources in order to succeed at school. While EST plans can focus on academic issues, as noted above, schools can also put them in place for students who struggle with behavior issues. At Oak Grove, students who face severe behavioral challenges can receive support from an EST, which consists of the principal, the behavior support specialist, the school counselor, the school-based social worker, the school nurse, and a number of educators (including special educators, classroom teachers, and intervention teachers). The ESTs make individualized plans for students and regularly check in on the students' progress toward participating in the school environment in healthy and productive ways.

### **Professional Development**

Educators at Oak Grove access multiple types of professional development, from meetings offered or coordinated by the supervisory union, to school-based development, to individually-pursued courses.

For instance, multiple types of professional development occur at the school level. Staff members at Oak Grove meet after school every Tuesday. The focus of these meetings rotates week-to-week; one Tuesday is reserved for a school-wide staff meeting and the next is reserved for collaborative planning in vertical teams. These every-other-week vertical team meetings are a time for analyzing student data and using these data to make decisions about lesson plans and student grouping practices. Additionally, three times per year, the supervisory union's literacy and math coaches come to the school to hold all day data meetings, where educators engage in intensive conversations about student performance information and make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and, especially, how to place students in Tier 2 intervention groups.

The supervisory union has four professional development days throughout the year, during which central office personnel offer training to teachers across the supervisory union. Topics for these sessions have included training in the Letrs program, the Keys to Literacy program, and the Collins Writing Program. Supervisory union-sponsored professional development has also focused on how to interpret data and how to use it to inform instruction. In addition to these trainings, twice per year, the supervisory union holds grade-level meetings so that educators of the same grades can meet with each other and make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Teachers at Oak Grove also have access to resources to pursue their own professional development. Along with teachers across WSESU, Oak Grove educators can either take a three-credit course at the University of Vermont or use equivalent funds to engage in other training or attend a professional conference.

## School Culture

According to school staff, at Oak Grove, educators will not settle for low expectations of students. In the words of one staff member, “our school isn’t okay with ‘okay.’” Teachers assume that their students are capable of high achievement, and according to a central office official, hold themselves accountable to a culture of learning not only for their students but also for themselves. Furthermore, school staff consistently report that Oak Grove is a “happy school,” where the principal supports teachers’ decisions, where adults work hard to form relationships with students, and where community and parent engagement is high.

Educators at Oak Grove also describe that the school has positive connections with the community. Parents and children spend time in the playground before and after school, where parents interact with staff members and each other. Parents and community members regularly attend the Wednesday morning All School Sing assemblies. According to school staff members, parents and other community members actively support and have pride for Oak Grove.

## SUMMARY

The previous sections of this report outline several characteristics that are central to the teaching and learning context at Oak Grove. These characteristics include:

**Common curriculum.** In recent years, educators at Oak Grove and throughout the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union have made changes in their curricular approach, especially in English language arts and mathematics. Specifically, Oak Grove educators adopted a common school-wide curriculum, with a phonics emphasis in English language arts and problem-solving focus in mathematics.

**Multiple supports for struggling students.** Educators at Oak Grove take implementation of the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model seriously and have the resources necessary to implement this model with fidelity. For instance, Oak Grove teachers have access to benchmark data and support in analyzing these data from the supervisory union, and they use this student performance information to place students into skills-based intervention groups. Oak Grove educators also have time to provide students in these groups with sustained interventions; they embed time for intervention into the school day four to five times per week, and struggling students receive Tier 2 instruction from a variety of school personnel, including credentialed tutors.

**Teacher collaboration and data-based decision making.** All staff meet twice per month to discuss issues that impact the entire school, and teachers meet in vertical teams two times each month to collaborate on matters of curriculum, instruction, and lesson planning. In each of these endeavors, educators rely on student performance data from multiple assessments – to which they have access through real-time data management systems that allow them to review student information at any time – to inform their work.

**Consistent and sustained support from the supervisory union.** Oak Grove does not have instructional coaches at the school site, but WSESU employs a full-time literacy coach and a

part-time math coach in addition to a full-time literacy curriculum coordinator and a part-time math curriculum coordinator. These central office personnel provide coaching and support to Oak Grove teachers throughout the school year; the literacy coach, in particular, is often in the school at least once per week.

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

The previous sections of this report outline multiple patterns of resource allocation at Oak Grove Elementary School. In many ways, the school's resource allocation aligns with the Evidence-Based (EB) model. However, there are also ways in which the school diverges from the model. The following paragraphs identify key similarities and differences.

### **Staffing**

In some ways, Oak Grove's staffing patterns align with the EB model. For instance, the school's number of core teachers is nearly on point with the EB recommendations – particularly for students in the early elementary grades (kindergarten through grade 3), where the class sizes across these grades average 17 students, which is the EB average for its prototypical elementary schools. Furthermore, across the entire school, the ratio of elective to core teachers (.26) is only just above the EB model recommendations for elementary schools (.2).

In other ways, Oak Grove's staffing patterns do not align with EB recommendations. For instance, Oak Grove is under-staffed with respect to instructional coaches, since the school does not have any personnel filling these positions.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, Oak Grove has staffing resources that surpass the EB recommendations in a few areas. The school has larger numbers of Tier 2 interventionists and pupil support personnel (especially behavior support personnel) than is included in the EB model. Like many Vermont schools, the number of para-educators at Oak Grove is higher than would be provided by the EB model.

### **Embrace of an RTI Model with Strong Tier 1 and 2 Approaches to Core Curriculum and Instruction**

Oak Grove, along with other schools in the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, provides instruction under a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model. MTSS drives the school's approach to supporting students' academic and behavioral growth. Educators at Oak Grove devote substantial amounts of time each day to Tier 1 instruction in English language arts (90 minutes) and mathematics (70 minutes). During this Tier 1 time, they rely on rigorous curriculum (particularly in English language arts) that they adopted alongside other schools in WSESU. They supplement this Tier 1 instruction with consistent, schoolwide Tier 2 instruction during "skills block," where students receive small group instruction on specific skills.

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<sup>6</sup> While the Oak Grove does not have any non-teaching instructional coaches, teachers at Oak Grove can receive support from coaches at the supervisory union, which employs a full-time literacy instructional coach and a part-time math instructional coach. Still, the EB model would provide resources for this position at the school-level.

As noted above, the MTSS process also applies to students' behavioral growth. At Oak Grove, multiple supports encourage appropriate social-emotional development. For instance, the school implements PBIS, and adults consistently reward students individually and collectively for positive behavior. The school also has multiple support personnel to help students who struggle with behavior, and, like schools throughout Vermont, students can receive educational support team (EST) assistance for behavioral struggles in addition to academic challenges.

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

Students at Oak Grove take a variety of benchmark, formative, and summative assessments, and educators at the school take information from these assessments into account when they make curricular decisions, plan instructional approaches, and assign students to Tier 2 skills block groups. The supervisory union is incredibly supportive of this endeavor, and, in addition to the regular school-based collaborative meetings in which teachers discuss student assessment data, supervisory union coaches come to Oak Grove three times a year to engage in a day-long, intensive data meeting.

### **Collaboration Among Educators**

At Oak Grove, teachers are organized into vertical teams, which meet twice per month in regularly-scheduled afterschool meetings. Vertical teams use time to discuss student data, group students for instruction, and share curricular materials. Additionally, twice per month, Oak Grove educators meet as an entire staff to collaborate with each other regarding whole-school issues. The school's practice of teacher collaboration would align more fully with the EB model if it occurred more frequently (such as, after the student school day, for instance), since the EB model provides resources for teachers to meet three times a week for 45 minutes each time.

In sum, Oak Grove is a school that has channeled its resources to promote positive outcomes for its students. As is recommended by the EB model, the school privileges staff collaboration, decision-making based on information about student outcomes, and protected time for interventions for struggling students. In these and other ways, staff at Oak Grove demonstrate their commitment to student success.