



# Beating the Odds: TVAAS Growth in ELA and Math during the Pandemic

## Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

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### Key Findings

#### Survey Results

- Principals were asked to identify two key factors they believed influenced their students' growth in ELA and/or math. Fifty percent of the responses indicated targeted instruction/intervention was important, and 25% of responses noted teacher development as a key factor.
- The majority of responses about District resources that played a role in student growth noted aspects of RTI2, especially online interventions and small group sessions (50%). Thirty-nine percent identified the ELA and/or math curriculum as an important resource.
- Ninety percent of respondents indicated that teacher collaboration on instruction was an absolutely central school strategy for their student's growth. The same number (90%) also rated data analysis/monitoring as absolutely central.
- When asked what feedback principals would give their peers to improve student growth, the most common response (57.1%) noted the importance of teachers in the process, followed by the importance of an effective schedule (14.3%), and using data to target instruction and intervention (14.3%).

#### Focus Group

- Principals elaborated on how data were used as they linked to student growth. Student data were used to:
  - Provide deliberate, intentional instruction/intervention for students in their area of need
  - Track student progress
  - Identify classroom instructional practices that were and were not working
  - Align classroom assignments with state standards and TNReady style questions
- Principals discussed a variety of ways teachers were supported, including:
  - Developing teachers' understanding of what students are being assigned to do and linking assignments to standards
  - Helping teachers shift their mindset to embrace changes
  - Keeping teachers focused on the important aspects of teaching and school
  - Providing additional support for new teachers designed specifically for them

### Introduction

In August 2021, the state released the latest TVAAS growth scores for schools that were based on TCAP achievement test scores from spring 2019 and spring 2021. This time period included the 2019-20 school year, which ended at the start of the pandemic in March 2020, and the 2020-21 school year, which provided remote instruction to all students until the final quarter when some students returned to in-person learning. Given that COVID learning loss has been well documented



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not only at the national level,<sup>1,2</sup> but at the state<sup>3</sup> and local level<sup>4</sup> too, it was anticipated that most schools in the District would show low TVAAS growth scores for this two-year pandemic period.

However, a handful of District-managed SCS schools demonstrated that, despite the odds, they were able to maintain or grow student progress during this time. Eleven schools (seven elementary schools and four high schools) maintained or extended student progress according to the following criteria: 1) they earned a TVAAS composite score of either 4 or 5; 2) they earned a TVAAS composite score of 3 plus a 5 in either ELA or Math; or 3) they earned a TVAAS score of 3 for the composite score, ELA score, and Math score.

School	TVAAS Composite	TVAAS ELA	TVAAS Math
Middle College High	5	5	5
Hollis Price Middle College High	5	5	3
Sheffield Elementary	4	5	1
Sharpe Elementary	4	4	3
Richland Elementary	4	3	4
Cordova High	3	5	1
Delano Elementary	3	5	1
East High	3	5	1
Northaven Elementary	3	3	3
Scenic Hills Elementary	3	3	3
Treadwell Elementary	3	3	3

Identified schools completed a survey focusing on factors and strategies that contributed to student growth, as well as identifying challenges they faced. Survey responses were used to identify themes to explore more fully in a discussion about student growth over the two-year period. Principals from ten schools completed the online survey, and eight schools participated in a focus group to further discuss topics related to student growth.

<sup>1</sup> Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt that Could Last a Lifetime*. Public Sector Practice: McKinsey & Company.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond, M. E. (2020). *Estimates of Learning Loss in the 2019-2020 School Year*. The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University: Stanford, CA.

<sup>3</sup> TDOE (2020). *Tennessee Releases Data Showing Significant Learning Loss Among K-12 Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.tn.gov/education/news/2020/9/23/tennessee-releases-data-showing-significant-learning-loss-among-k-12-students.html> on 10/27/21.

<sup>4</sup> Sell, M. A. (2020 & 2021). *COVID-19 School Closures and Student Learning Loss*. Research and Performance Management Research Brief, Shelby County Schools: Memphis, TN. Retrieved from <http://www.scsk12.org//rpm//files/2021/Measuring%20K-8%20COVID%20Learning%20Loss%20with%20iReady.pdf> on 10/27/21.



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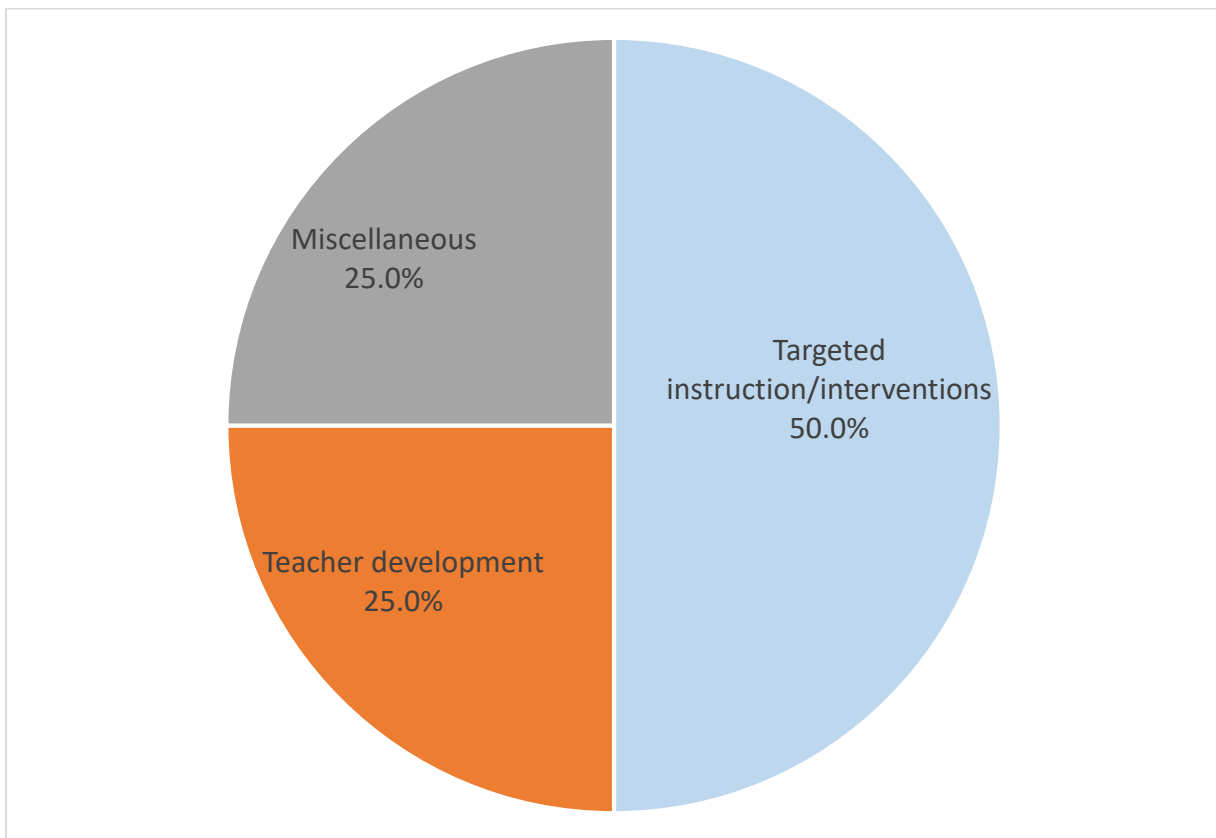
### Survey Results

Respondents have served an average of 4.6 years as principals at their current school and 5.2 years as principal overall. Seven of ten principals have spent their entire career at their current school.

Given that the TVAAS growth measure included a year of virtual learning, respondents were asked about their experiences with remote instruction. Eighty percent of respondents indicated that remote instruction was somewhat or very difficult; and 70% indicated remote instruction negatively impacted student growth.

When asked about the top two key influences that led to their school's ELA and/or Math growth, half of the responses identified factors related to targeted instruction and interventions such as small group instruction, mandatory tutorials for all EOC courses, using data to identify skill deficits, daily school-wide interventions/enrichment programs for all students, and differentiated support for ELA students. One quarter of the responses identified teacher development as key, such as utilizing Peer Power Success Coaches and ILT leadership, time for collaborative planning for instructional practices, and instructional hybrid model strategies. The remaining responses identified a variety of factors, including focusing on accountability and consistency, using NearPod and writing activities for engaging and interactive instruction, and administering aligned, rigorous assessments.

Chart 1: Name & briefly describe two key influences that you believe led to your school's ELA and/or Math growth.



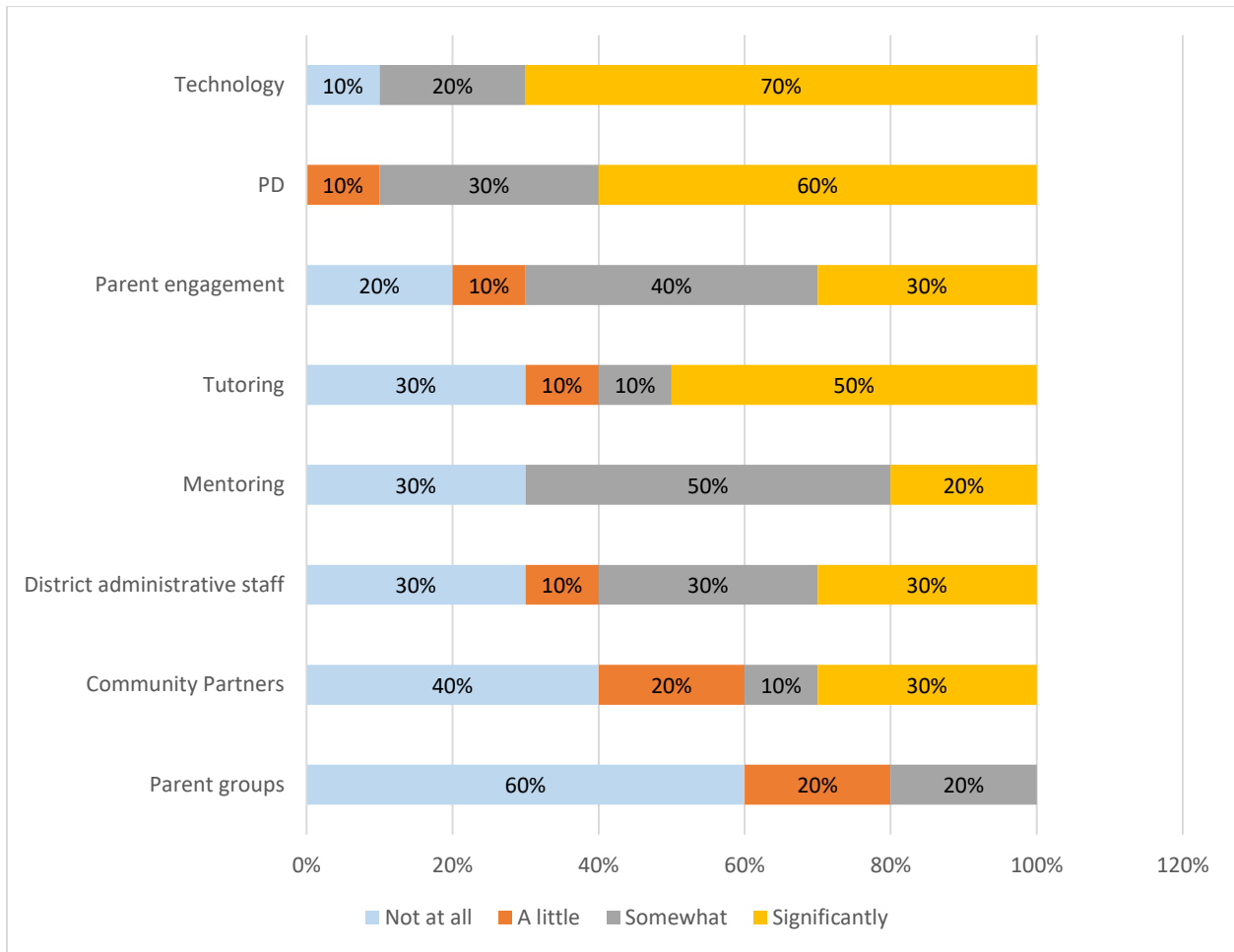


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Chart 2 shows the extent to which respondents believed that certain factors accounted for their school's ELA and/or Math growth. All respondents reported both technology as significant (70%) or somewhat significant (20%) and PD as significant (60%) or somewhat significant (30%) to their success. Other significant or somewhat significant factors were parent engagement (70%), tutoring (60%), and mentoring (70%). Sixty percent (60%) of respondents identified District administrative staff as at least somewhat significant, while others identified community partners (40%) and parent groups (20%) as factors.

Chart 2: To what extent did any of the following factors account for your school's ELA and/or Math growth?



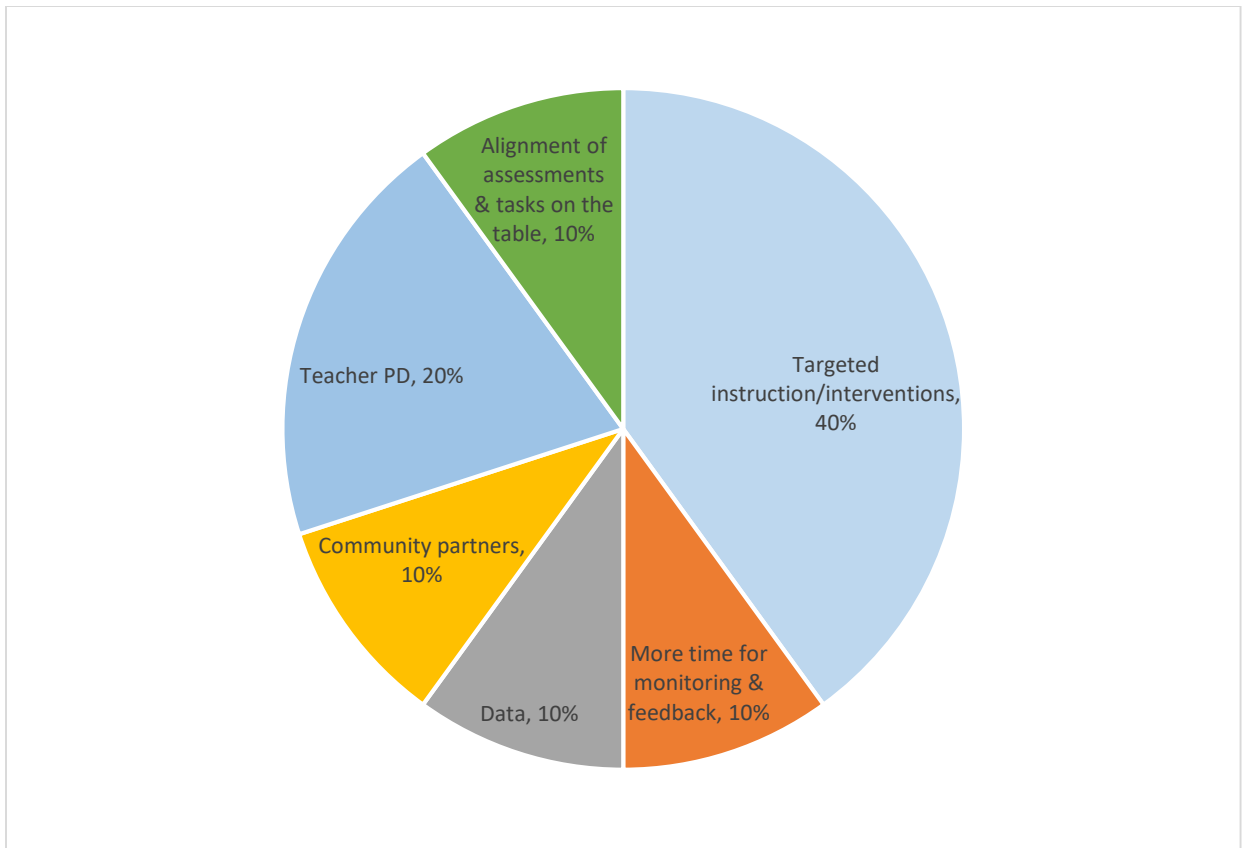


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Chart 3 shows the significant, positive changes from previous years that respondents felt contributed to their ELA and/or Math growth that were not specifically targeted for these subjects. Approximately 17% reported that there were none; however, for those who identified positive changes, the most frequently occurring response (40%) was providing targeted instruction/intervention such as small group instruction, creating personalized learning plans for all students, and utilizing extended learning programs.

Chart 3: Were there any significant positive changes from previous years that possibly improved your ELA and/or Math growth that weren't specifically targeted for these subjects (e.g., improved student-teacher ratio, increased parental involvement)? If so, briefly describe them.



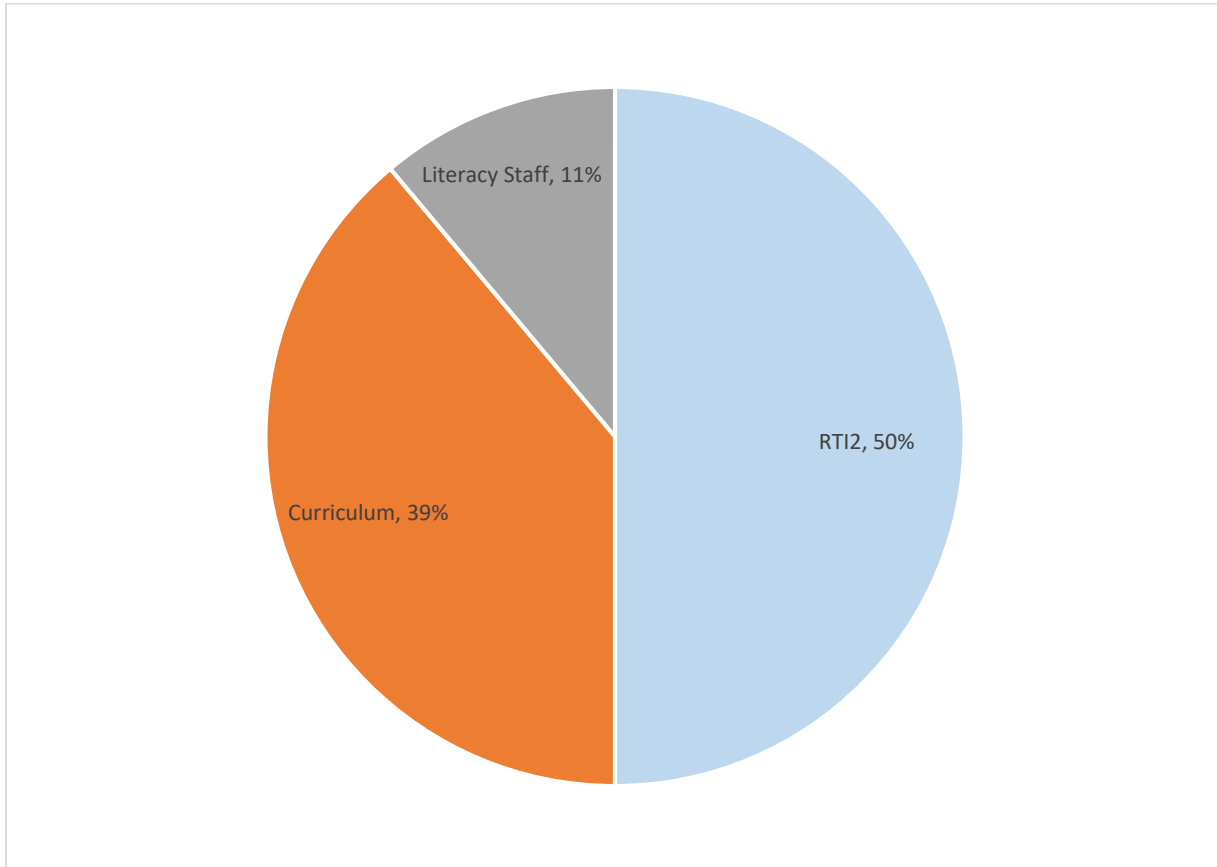


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When asked about the District resources that were important to their ELA and/or math success, 10% of respondents reported none. Among those who identified resources, 50% of the responses cited the RTI2 as important, with many explicitly mentioning online interventions and small group sessions. Thirty-nine percent of responses identified the ELA and/or Math curriculum as important and 11% indicated literacy staff were important to student growth.

Chart 4: What district resources, if any, were important to your success in ELA and/or math last year? (e.g.: Curriculum, Online interventions, Foundational Literacy Laureates, RTI2 small group, etc.)



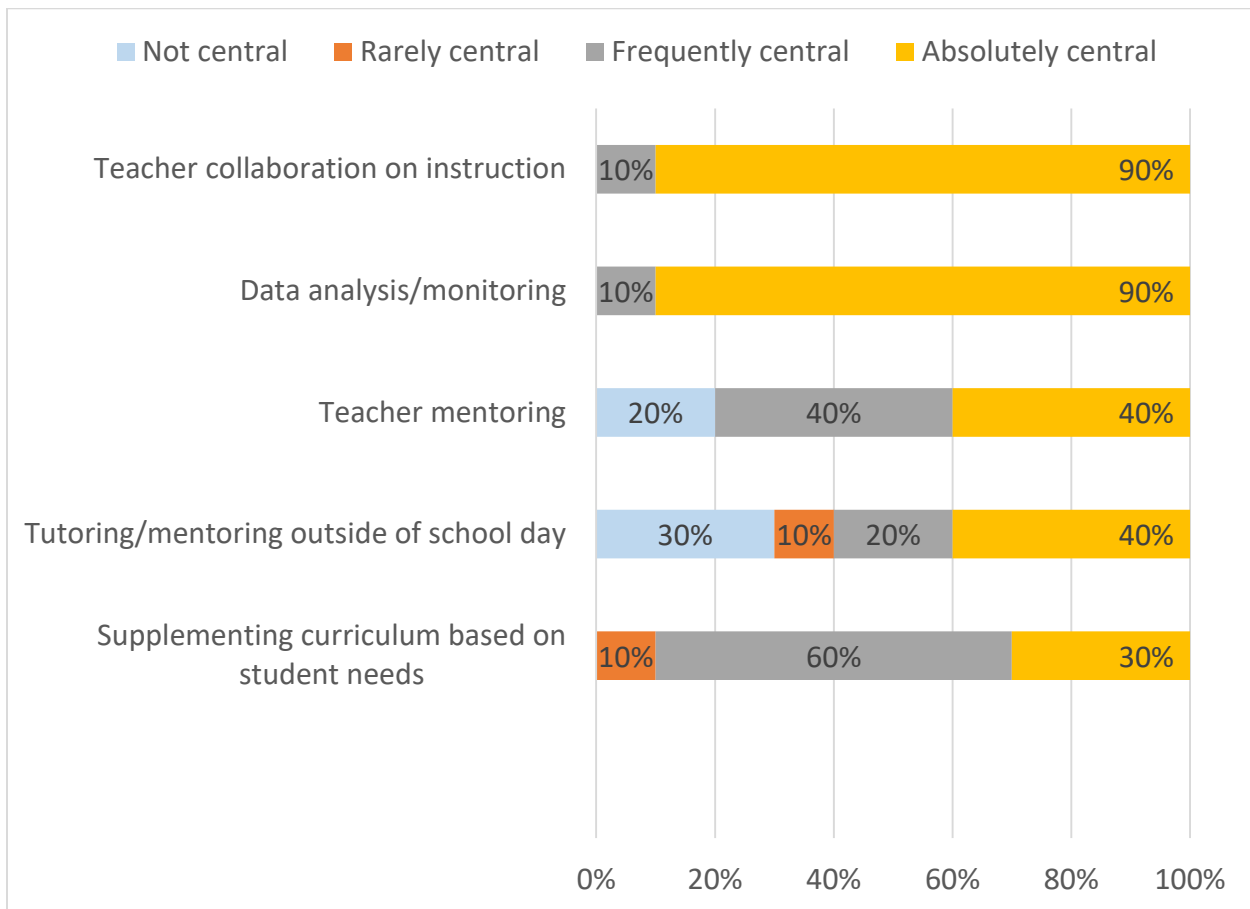


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When asked to rate the school strategies by how central they were to success, Chart 5 shows that 90% of respondents felt that teacher collaboration on instruction was absolutely central, as was data analysis/monitoring. Forty percent of respondents felt that teacher mentoring was absolutely central to their schools' success; and another 40% indicated that providing tutoring/mentoring outside of school hours was absolutely central. Additionally, over the last two years, 90% of respondents reported that they or other school leaders added or reallocated resources in their schools to support literacy or math.

Chart 5: Rate your school strategies by how central they were to your school's success.



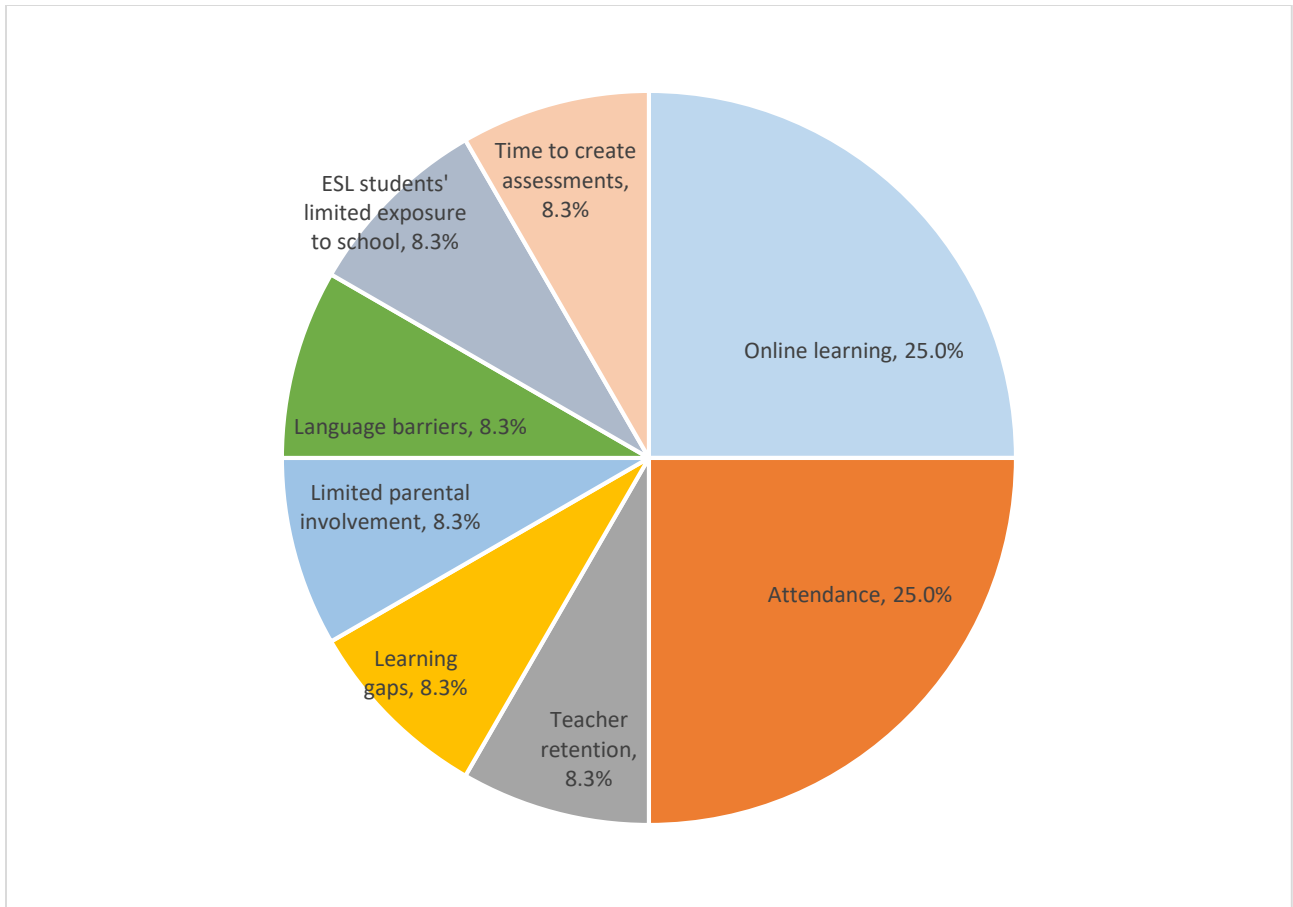


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Principals were asked to identify the challenges they faced while working towards improvements in ELA and/or Math. Twenty-five percent of the responses identified student attendance as an issue, such as inconsistent attendance during virtual learning, chronic absenteeism, and lack of participation in afterschool tutoring. Another 25% of responses were related to online learning, including difficulty installing needed software, inability to monitor and provide immediate feedback, and students' difficulties keeping track of and planning for assignments. Other challenges are illustrated in Chart 6 below.

Chart 6: Briefly describe any challenges your school faced while working towards ELA and/or Math growth.





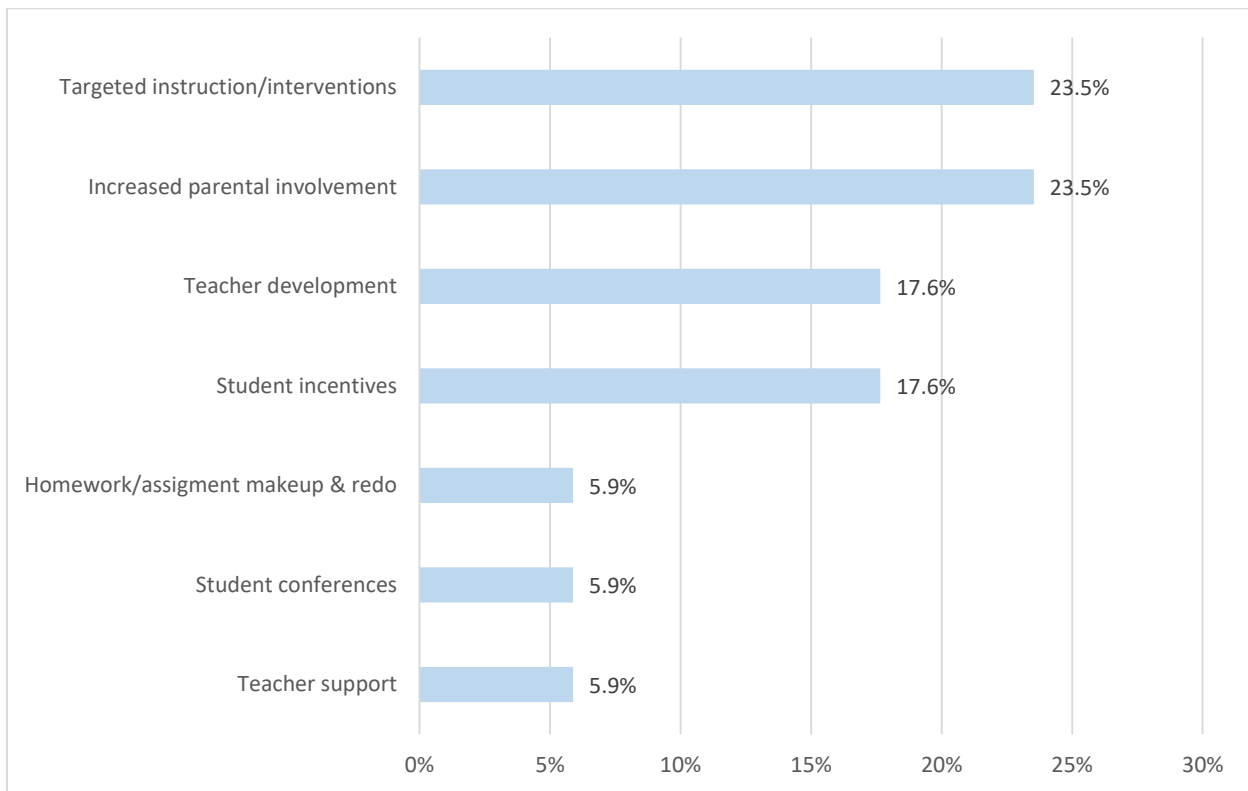


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Chart 7 shows the strategies respondents used to address these challenges. The most frequently occurring responses (23.5%) were delivering targeted instruction/interventions such as small group instruction and afterschool tutoring; and increased parental involvement through improved communication, utilizing Family Engagement Specialists and Guidance Counselors, and using a bilingual mentor to assist with ESL parents. Aspects of teacher development and providing student incentives for attendance each accounted for 17.6% of the responses. Last, 5.9% of responses cited providing students with opportunities to redo and make up missed assignments, holding student conferences when needed, and administrators providing teachers with assistance in developing assessments.

Chart 7: Briefly explain how your school addressed these challenges.



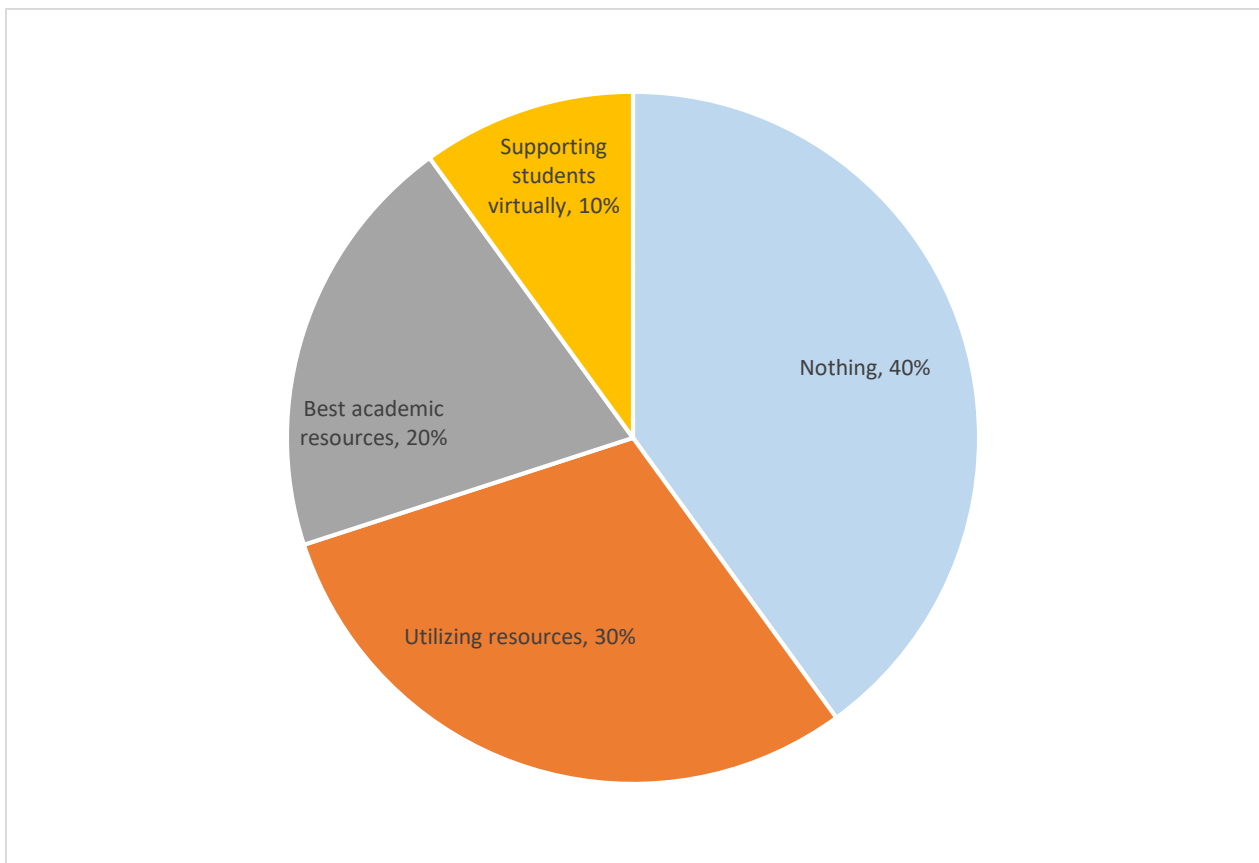


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When principals were asked what they wished they had known or had access to that may have improved ELA or math growth, 40% responded they could not think of anything. Thirty percent the responses related to utilizing resources such as understanding the importance of the ILT, relying on ILDs and ISAs for more support for teachers, and working with data sources. Twenty percent of the responses mentioned having the best academic resources such as a better test bank of vetted questions or a different curriculum. Finally, 10% of responses indicated knowledge of how to support students virtually would have been helpful.

Chart 8: Describe anything you wish you would have known and any resources/supports you would have liked to have had sooner that you believe would have strengthened your ELA and/or Math growth.



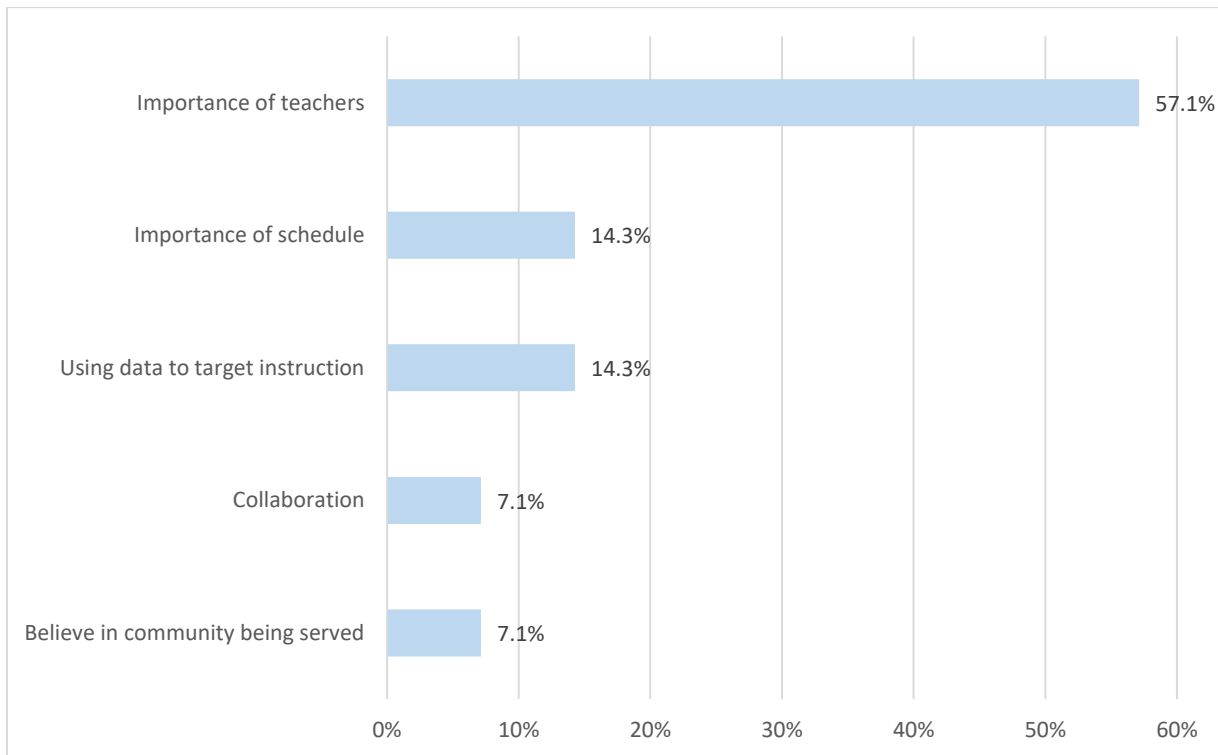


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Chart 9 displays principal responses when asked to provide feedback to colleagues considering their students' growth in ELA and/or math. The most frequently occurring response was related to the importance of teachers as part of the process, including building teacher capacity, improving teacher relations, creating consistency to allow for teacher buy-in, and fostering autonomy. This was followed by the importance of schedule (honoring the dedicated intervention time, allowing time for meaningful reteaching), and using student data to target instruction and/or intervention.

Chart 9: Please provide any feedback or advice for others who might want to implement your best practices.



### Open-Ended Responses for Importance of Teachers Category

#### Build Teacher Capacity

“Develop and support teachers by building their capacity around the work.”

“Dig, dig, dig...work with teachers to build their capacity toward creating rigorous, aligned assessments.”

#### Improve Teacher Relationships

“Involve teachers in the decision making process.”

“Get in the trenches with teachers by learning when they learn. Be an active listener and ensure that everyone understands the sense of urgency, which should be demonstrated through their actions.”

#### Create Consistency

“Create a uniform, consistent writing program that your teachers believe in and are committed to.”



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“As with anything consistency is key and having teacher buy-in to the process was vital to our success. Creating the individualized learning plans allowed us to identify skill deficits within the standard and provide streamlined support to meet the academic needs of each student.”

“Be intentional and don’t change course even though you are not seeing immediate results. It takes time.”

### Foster Autonomy

“Micromanagement is the killer of growth. Once you choose your team, trust them, and provide support along the way. This builds a positive culture and climate and will encourage teachers to grow themselves to grow others.”

### Focus Group

Several topics were identified for the focus group discussion from the survey results. The goal of the focus group was to allow participants to provide more information and flesh out comments made in the survey.

#### Topic 1: Elaborating on Data Use

In survey responses, virtually every school mentioned their use of data as a factor that affected student growth in some capacity. This section provides more details of what that process looked like at different schools.

**Theme 1: A variety of student data were used to provide deliberate, intentional support to students in their area(s) of need.**

- During the daily intervention/enrichment block, one larger elementary school used iReady data to group all Tier 1 students within each grade level according to skill deficits areas. While Tier 2, Tier 3, and advanced students were in their sessions during this block, the grade level teachers were each responsible for teaching a group of students targeting the area in which they struggled with ELA or math skills. Another school mentioned that all students were grouped according to skills and participated in small group work with teachers, regardless of their level of mastery, so that even Tier 1 students received intentional and deliberate instruction during small group time.
- One school used a standards tracker board to track the results of bi-weekly common assessments that were administered every other Friday. Students were grouped according to the standards that were not mastered for the purposes of small group instruction.
- A third school analyzed student work to drive decisions:

“We analyze student work regularly as a collaborative group, and we have other teachers look at each other’s student work so it’s not a biased evaluation of it. And just having those collaborative conversations have really helped us boost the benefits of our RTI time.”

**Theme 2: Schools used data to track student progress throughout the year**

- One elementary school worked with students to take ownership of their own data and track their progress on District formative assessments and teacher-made classroom assessments with the goal of moving up from one level to the next. Students better understand how they are grouped during small group instruction and benefit from peer assistance.



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- Another elementary school tracked student progress on weekly assessments through the color-coded system in MasteryConnect that groups students according to their proficiency level (mastered, on track, approaching, below).

“Our goal was always to change one color. So if you were in the red band, let’s change that to orange. If you’re in orange, let’s change it to green. And if you’re green, change it to blue.”

### Theme 3: Schools used data to identify what was working and not working during class instruction.

- Two high schools used data from common formative assessments through MasteryConnect or data from previous EOCs to help determine which teacher instructional practices were effective or those that were not.

“We (use MasterConnect data) to really challenge what’s happening in the classroom from a PLC standpoint. So, the curriculums are the same, the content’s the same, the assessments are the same. So what we try to do is isolate the only variable that is independent, and that is teacher instructional practices.... So, then we’ll look at the data from the CFAs...if we see a great outlier. Either somebody who did really well on that CFA or somebody, their students did poorly on that CFA. Then we stress their professional responsibility to either share what they did well or admit that what they did didn’t work...and learn what worked better for other people.”

“We look at what specific math area are we struggling (in) and what are those teacher practices that are either leading to success or leading to challenge? And we try to hone in on that because...sometimes when we dive into that, it may be an instructional issue as opposed to a student need for intervention. And then sometimes it is the actual need for intervention for the student. But we start with the data and then go to the teacher and from there to the students.”

### Theme 4: Student classwork and assignments were considered a data source. Schools engaged in ongoing monitoring of the alignment of student work to state standards and TNReady level rigor.

- One elementary school took a close look at the “tasks on the table” and how well tasks such as do nows and exit tickets aligned with question types that would be on the TNReady assessment so students could practice TNReady style questions throughout the year.
- One school helped teachers examine the standard and performance-based objective in relation to the work students were being asked to do (e.g., practice questions, do nows, exit tickets) to ensure that the quality of assigned work was at the level of rigor comparable to TNReady. This process provided more informative data to track student progress.

“Once we had that down, we felt that our data was better...(and) we could look for the real misconceptions and what students were missing. And so some of the support we gave to teachers was just that. How do we find the misconceptions in student...work? And then how do we come back and address those things with quality things to do?”



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- One school provided professional development on how to break down standards and examine the components of the standards.

“(Some standards)...are very broad...and so we went back and looked at the types of questions students were not mastering.”

**Theme 5: Data were analyzed and used to guide instruction and decisions on a continual basis throughout the year.**

- All schools noted that using data to drive instruction and student growth was a continual process throughout the school year. It was not a strategy that was used only once or twice a semester. Common formative assessments were administered and analyzed every two to three weeks. Progress monitoring and student work were evaluated regularly. Schools had designated times (usually daily or weekly) for additional instruction, reteaching, small group or station work, or tutoring. Additionally, interpreting data and making subsequent decisions was regular part of the schools’ team meetings.

### Topic 2: Teacher Support and Expectations

**Theme 1: Teachers were supported in understanding exactly what students were being assigned to do and why.**

- Schools examined the nature of student assignments and evaluated them on the purpose or rigor of the task.

“Is the thing I’m asking (the students) to do worth them doing? What’s my purpose of grades? Is it to show learning? Is it to show mastery? Why is this assignment being graded and what does that grade mean? And I really think that helped leverage some of the changes in our classrooms.... Being intentional about our...tasks and assignments.”

**Theme 2: Teachers were supported through the process of shifting their mindset.**

- Schools mentioned challenges related to asking teachers to shift away from what they were comfortable and familiar with in their approach to their work.

“We had to make some adjustments to the way we looked at the data. And we provided supports in terms of walking them through and taking baby steps with making changes in the building. And so...they started looking at the data differently and, really, embracing allowing the students to own the data and then taking steps to report the data out differently than what they had done in the past by working through it with their students and using the student reports.... And so those reports, the teachers were crafting those, and they really didn’t want to do that at first. But it really helped us identify where the deficits were.... And they began having their own meetings outside of our PLC meetings because they wanted to look at the data....”

“But the first year, when we would do Boost, the teachers (would) try to use that as ‘Okay, kids you do something at your desk’ and this was time for them to grade papers and so we had to change that mindset and make sure they know...there’s teaching in small groups.”



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**Theme 3: Teachers were supported by keeping their focus on the important aspects of teaching and school.**

- One school intentionally focused conversations with the entire staff on one of three areas: 1) culture and relationships; 2) the purpose and meaning of grades; and 3) whether the task on the table was worth doing. By consistently focusing on these areas, teachers were able to concentrate on “key levers and indicators of success.”
- Another school helped teachers with understanding and appropriately implementing the curriculum and pacing, and other schedules, by emphasizing the professional responsibility and accountability aspects of their job.

**Theme 4: New teachers were provided additional support designed specifically for them.**

- One school held monthly meetings for new teachers to help them stay on track and make sure they were aware of what they needed to know about the school and curriculum. The sessions covered everything from modeling teaching to TEM evaluations. They worked with a mentor who provided feedback about areas needing more support and they got feedback from the new teachers, themselves, on what topics they wanted to know more about.

### **Topic 3: Teacher Collaboration**

- Most schools allowed for collaborative planning time for teachers in common subjects. One smaller school used vertical planning as there was only one subject teacher per grade level. Two other small schools coordinated collaborative planning days with each other to allow teachers to connect with others who taught the same content and grade level.
- One school encouraged their teachers to standardize teaching across subject areas and grade levels. For example, teachers used the same terminology to teach the steps of writing an essay or used the same steps to solve a math problem. By standardizing, students were hearing familiar language as they moved from teacher to teacher or to the next grade level.

### **Topic 4: Student and Family Challenges**

**Theme 1: Student absenteeism and engagement were, and continue to be, difficult challenges for schools.**

- Schools reported that the student attendance challenges experienced during virtual teaching last year are continuing this year. Often, the same groups of students who were frequently absent during virtual teaching have chronic absenteeism this year.
- During virtual instruction, students would log in to be counted as present but then log out for the rest of the day. Despite school efforts to call families, students rarely logged back in. This year, several students have extended absences due to COVID or COVID exposure. Additionally, robo-calls to inform parents of a COVID case in the building often results in parents keeping students home from school even when they were not at risk of exposure. Most schools stated they spent a lot of time calling families of students with a high number of absences. One school reported they divided the phone call tasks by grade level and shared the responsibility of calling families among school administration and office staff to be able to call each family daily (40+ calls per day per grade level).
- Some schools wondered whether families or students were taking advantage of the District’s COVID exposure guidelines this year to be away for extended periods with excused absences.





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“Now where our attendance is, we’re struggling with it this year more than we usually do. We feel like some people...we’ve had a couple families that they keep saying someone in their household has been exposed so they keep the kids out and we are wondering, yeah, I think they’ve gone through every family member at least once and they haven’t come back, so we have kids that have been out for...over 20 days now and trying to get them in and then, you know, trying to give them packets of asynchronous work.... These are the same kids that...we struggled with last year so we are very concerned about all our kids, especially those we’ve rarely seen.”

“For us, the beginning of the year was a little rocky and it’s kind of tapered out as it pertains to attendance.... What we found happening...is that students learn very quickly, especially at the high school level, that if they said they had exposure they could stay home and not have to log in. So we noticed an uptick and a whole lot of exposures but no COVID cases, and we found from prodding and probing that it was a known thing that if you said you had exposure, this was the protocol.... So what we started doing was, to help those students, we set up Saturday school. And so once they returned from having missed we allowed them to do Saturday school and we noticed as soon as we gave that additional support, the number of exposures dropped tremendously.”

“For us, attendance (rate) is always a nightmare...particularly when the District passed the grading protocol to where kids don’t actually have to pass a quarter because they can make everything up, that really hurt us.”

- It was difficult to maintain student engagement during virtual and hybrid instruction last year. Student attention span while in online instruction was challenging. This year, schools are seeing more academic gaps, especially among students who were at home during the hybrid teaching option last spring.

### **Theme 2: Remote learning exposed parents’ vulnerabilities, and yet schools were dependent on parents for virtual instruction to succeed.**

- Schools talked about the challenge of parents not knowing how to help, or inappropriately helping, their children with virtual learning.

“It placed parents in a huge position of vulnerability and so one of the things that we did to combat that was we held open labs for our parents virtually so we could walk them through using Teams and also help them locate the various apps that would be beneficial to the students. And then we held parent meetings to just engage parents in asking questions and helping them to understand how to help their children at home.... Many of our parents joined us for those sessions and a lot of them joined in for the open labs, and I also think that attributed to some of the success.”

“It was hard sometimes to know, in the case with our parents, who was actually taking the assessments and sometime we actually knew who was taking ‘cause we could hear the parents whispering the answers. And we would even tell the parents, ‘You know, you’re not helping your child. We’re trying to assess so we know how to better teach your child.’ “





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### **Topic 5: Additional Observations from Principals about Factors that Led to Student Growth**

- One principal commented that by noticing what wasn't working in the classroom and making quick changes, the school supported student growth. For example, when the school noticed that students still did not fare well on assessments after reteaching, "we had to nix the reteach schedule and focus more on good first teaching to make sure that the best was put (out) the first time."
- Another school monitored the percentage of students who needed reteach support each week as an indicator of whether the quality first teaching needed support.
- One principal commented that when the entire school was virtual last year, it freed up the administrators from some of their typical additional operational responsibilities and allowed them to be in the classrooms all day providing feedback and holding teachers accountable. Additionally, administrators were able to participate in all of the PLC meetings which served as another source of teacher support.
- One principal commented on how the process of supporting student growth is a work in progress and that they are eager to build in the momentum from last year and bring it into this year.