



Day 1 Welcome and Keynote: Lessons Learned from Schools Beating the Odds to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Tessie Bailey: I am the director of the PROGRESS Center, and I am excited to share our lessons learned after about six years of this work of the center and specifically the findings from our Beating the Odds analysis.

When we were funded six years ago, the primary outcome of our center was to identify what are those essential elements that promote progress for students with disabilities. And so, I'm excited to be joined by my colleague who is going to share a little bit about how the study was set up and then I'll end up sharing some of the findings. If you have questions at any time about how the study was designed, please add those in the Q&A. You're also free to add anything in the chat box and we'll respond to that as we move through the session.

So, I'll start off by saying, one of the challenges that we had with the center was really to understand what was progress? As Amy mentioned at the very beginning, what really launched our center was the Endrew F. Supreme Court decision and it has this part in here, which is appropriate progress. And as we were moving through the center's work, people kept saying but what is progress for students with disabilities?

And we actually sat down and said we haven't really been explicit about what this looks like. We did a case analysis; we did an analysis of IDEA statutes and regulations and what you see here is sort of a graphic illustration of what is progress for students with disabilities. And I want to point out what's on the right-hand side, where it says post-school success. Because ultimately all of the work that we do, whether we're working with birth to two or we're working in the transition space it's really to help students be prepared for post-school living. And this is also a priority for the U.S. Department of Education. Every LEA in the United States reports to its state and every state reports to the U.S. Department of Education. This indicator, that you see cited here at the bottom. And it's looking at the number of students with disabilities who after graduation from school are enrolled in higher education or some sort of post-secondary education settings or are competitively employed or within a training program.

So ultimately everything that we do, the start to finish IEPs, our collaboration with other educators is to prepare students for post-school living. Now, while that's a really large outcome from a school setting, we can really only control what happens while students are in school. So, if you step back

where it says performance on national accountability measures this is what we often think about for students within our school systems. So, for students with disabilities, we want them to be able to achieve similar post-school outcomes and similar school outcomes as kids without disabilities. We define those as things like our state assessments, graduation, you might have district statewide assessments that really are indicators of successful completion of that year or a period of time. We also report those from an LEA up to a state and state up to the U.S. Department of [Education] through several indicators that you see cited here at the bottom.

Now for most of us who are teachers and are working directly in schools we see the day-to-day progress of students with disabilities as that grade level progress. And if you look at the definition of an IEP, the intent of that IEP is to make sure that students can progress in the general education curriculum. It's not just on IEP goals, but really all of the services that we put together are for school success. And because we measure school from a year-to-year basis, we're looking at grade-level progress. Now, most of that progress, as you'll see from some of our findings, comes from their experience and exposure to the general curriculum. So it requires this collaboration between general Ed. and Special Ed.

Now we have this other indicator of progress that I think of as special educators we most think about. And that is our annual goal progress, but if you look at these ultimate outcomes of post-school success, you can see that progress on an annual goal is a very narrow indicator of progress. It's an essential piece of it, because the intent is that if students can make progress on these annual goals, then we can increase their likelihood of making progress in the grade-level curriculum, which would then allow them to be able to be successful on state and national accountability measures which ultimately supports post-school success.

So for our center, trying to figure out where is the indicator of progress, we primarily focused on the annual goal, grade-level progress, and as you'll see in our Beating the Odds, a national indicator of success for students with disabilities that we can then tease out by state and ultimately by district. Now, our learning that you'll see sort of culminating today is really what we've learned over the six years of the PROGRESS Center. And I am excited to see in the chat box; there's a number of our participants in our local partnership sites. We had about 15 sites over five years, and the intent was to really see what does this look like in a day-to-day.

So, we worked closely with the schools, the leaders, the teachers, and we also used this opportunity to field-test the way that our technical assistance would be provided and refined over time. So as Amy mentioned everything that we have available through the center is also available to you. And you can feel confident that those have been field-tested in a number of local partnership sites.

We also did some national trainings that were multi-day to share some of the initial findings through our multi-day coaching institutes, used that data from local educators to refine that messaging, clarify our model for the BTO so that we could ultimately test that.

In addition, we had 62 educators and residents because while we're sitting at the national level can look at this data, we needed to make sure that it was relevant, it made sense, could be interpreted within the local context. We also wanted to make sure that it could be interpreted across different states. We understand that you function in a unique context, but there are some things that we needed to tease out that said, as a nation, what's necessary for us to be able to promote progress for students with disabilities.

We looked at 22 submitted impact stories, in addition to the BTO schools, and what these schools looked at was the implementation of different elements or features of a school system and being able to look at what are the effects of those elements.

Finally, our comprehensive set of activities. So, everything that we did, we'd love to think that we did a great job, but we needed that external evaluation to really tease out what was working and what was not working. And in the first four years, we started to develop our model for what we would refer to as our Beating the Odds analysis, and we called that a BTO. You may not have heard too much about that, but Kaitlin's going to share, but it helped us to get to this culminating event referred to as the Beating the Odds to confirm what were those essential elements that were essential for school success. So, Kaitlin, I'll pass this over to you.

Kaitlin Anderson: Thanks Tessie. Hi, everyone so glad to be here. I'm just going to share a little bit about our approach in conducting the BTO analysis before we share more of the findings. So, for this BTO analysis, we started by identifying 10 states including D.C. where students with disabilities made growth between 2017 and 2019 on the national assessment for educational progress or NAEP. And those are the green states on this map. And then in each of those places in each of those states we identified schools where students with disabilities were outperforming expectations relative to other similar schools in the same state.

So specifically, these BTO schools were both outperforming expectations relative to similar schools as well as outperforming their state average. And the goal of this part of the analysis was to identify schools to then recruit and conduct focus groups to learn more about what might be driving their Beating the Odds status.

So next we'll show you what an outperforming school really looks like on the next couple of slides. We ultimately included five schools in our qualitative data collection but in the interest of time today we're just going to share what this looks like in two schools. So first this is one elementary school.

The lighter colored blue, those tallest bars are the actual performance levels for reading in 2018, 2019, and math for 2018 and 2019 and reading in 2022 we skipped a couple of years because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the availability of data. You can see that those light, those tallest bars are much higher and also much larger than their state averages, which are those white bars. So, in this particular school for example, in that second set of bars, nearly 70% of students with disabilities were scoring

proficient in math in 2018, 19, relative to a predicted value of less than 20% and a state average of only 12%.

So, we can move on to the next slide. So this is a similar graph but showing what this looks like for a middle school serving grades sixth through eighth and while the differences aren't quite as large as they were on the last figure you can still see that the actual proficiency rates were higher than what we'd expect and higher than the state averages. After selecting our five schools, we did some pilot groups as well, we also did focus groups in those five schools with general educators, special educators, and administrators. At the beginning of each of those conversations we asked each of these groups to identify which of these five elements were their school's top priorities or focus areas for supporting students with disabilities. All five of these were crucial, but we did ask them to choose the top three and across all groups of staff, the most important regularly cited were student belonging staff collaboration and effective instruction and student supports.

So, we're going to talk a little bit more about some of the findings from the BTO today, but really this is about learning from those six years of PROGRESS Center work. So now I'll hand it back over to Tessie.

Tessie Bailey: Kaitlin, I did have a question before we moved on. Can you explain why we're only seeing K-8 schools?

Kaitlin Anderson: We did include high schools in the analysis and there were relatively few high schools in the set of schools that we could recruit from. And rather than recruiting one high school from across the country we decided to just focus on K through eight levels, but I think it's an interesting area to look further at why high schools didn't show up as Beating the Odds consistently. These were consistently outperforming across both math and reading in two years, both in that 2018 and 2019 and 2022.

Tessie Bailey: And I think it's really important these two time periods because it really looks at sustainability and I think that's a big piece of identifying those essential elements. Sometimes you might have a great year, and things work out, but what we're looking for is schools who were focused on elements that led to sustained performance gains in both reading and math. And if you have a question for Kaitlin, feel free to just share that in the chat box or in the Q&A and she might answer that just directly or she'll come back on and share a little bit later.

But probably what you're most interested in is what we ended up finding. So something I'll point out before I move on is the elements here that you see were part of the initial model for the Beating the Odds and that was based on our four years of data analysis, it was very extensive from a meta-analysis our focus groups of educators, parents and teachers and students. And then our work with individual schools. So, our initial model really included some elements that you will see did not show up in the final findings. The way that we think about the findings is in this graphical element here on the right-hand side and it's evolved over time. When we first launched the center our data did not point out student belonging and you'll hear from both our panel and from our findings this focus on student

belonging really rose to the top as one of the largest predictors or more of those elements associated with school success. So, the blue points of our graphic really are those primary essential elements that were identified through our Beating the Odds analysis, as well as some of our early work. Around the edges you'll see what we consider to be facilitators of that work. And if you remember, on the previous slide one of the things that was a focus of our initial framework was this family engagement. And it was part of an essential point or considered to be an essential element, but through our work we have found that family engagement really is an underlying facilitator of all of the work and that we don't want to tease it out as its own single element and focus on it as a single element. Instead, we embed it within all of those elements that are necessary for school success.

So, before we get into the panel who's going to share what does it look like within a school, I do want to share a little bit about what we found in terms of those elements.

I will say that student belonging from our work surfaced as the most critical in terms of school success. And what's really exciting at the same time as our Beating the Odds, there were two other national reports that were happening at the same time. The TNTP which was released in probably in May, as well as the SWIFT center, had been doing work around what was essential for school success. Some of that related to students with disabilities but in some cases just general acceleration of school. And in all of those, belonging was identified as the primary element necessary for success to occur. In and of itself, it wasn't the outcome, but it was necessary for both academic and functional or social success of students. And part of that because students learn best and are most successful when they feel welcomed and they feel like they are part of the learning community, and we find this particularly in secondary settings that students who want to be there and feel like they belong there are more likely to attend and engage in the learning.

Something that we are also seeing is that students with disabilities unfortunately experience the less feeling of belonging and that was really the difference between some of the schools we had worked with prior to the study and the schools that were identified as beating the odds. And those schools that were identified as beating the odds made strategic efforts as you'll see in our panel conversation around ensuring that students felt like they belonged. There was intentional work within the school to create an environment in which students could participate and feel welcomed. And something that we struggled with or tried to reconcile is this difference between inclusion and belonging. Because at the beginning of the center, there was a lot of language around inclusion and as we were working with schools, we found that they were often thinking about helping kids get into the setting. It's almost like they were earning their way in, but you could always identify those students within a school setting. And in true belonging and those schools in which you could go into a classroom and all kids were getting the help that they needed, but you couldn't really tease out which students had IEPs and that implied regardless of who you were, what your access to federal programming was, you could get the supports and services that were necessary for you.

So, you can see this graphical element, and you'll see this as kind of similar to a tiered system of support, is that anybody who needed that help was able to access that help. And people will often say, how do you really promote belonging? And that is something over the course of our work and collaboration with Erik Carter out of Vanderbilt he's identified these 10 dimensions of what it looks like to belong.

And we often think about present, meaning you're physically in the classroom, you're sitting with kids without disabilities, but really in the schools that were beating the odds it was more than that. They felt welcomed in the classroom, they were known as who they were, versus their identity as a student with a disability. They were adequately supported. They had friends, they felt needed. It was more of a reciprocal relationship versus I think the old school model, which is you're earning your way into the general education classroom, and instead you are part of the general education classroom and we're going to offer you whatever you need in order to experience that same opportunity as kids who don't have a disability.

There's a lot of resources to help your school walk through this, but as you'll hear from our panel and what we found from some of our Beating the Odds schools, this really is at the core of academic success and it's making sure that we start the school year off where kids feel like this is a place that cares about them, is ready to help them learn and is able to support them in that learning. So on with that said, you'll see the student belonging at the top. We kind of lump this into a single element, that if you just provided kids with good instruction, everything would be peachy. But through our Beating the Odds analysis, as well as some of our other work, we started to realize that over the last two decades, there's been a blurring between the general education curriculum and the individualized support.

And in reality, we needed to think about these two things as two separate essential elements. That in order for a kid with a disability to be successful, they first had to have access to effective general education with support. So you can just imagine if special education funding went away, whatever we did within that classroom promoted a very large effect. And if you did effective general education curriculum appropriately, you would also have this feeling of student belonging. It's like a packaged deal and that has the base effect that kids get when they enter into school.

So, when we thought about instruction, we ultimately had to separate those two into two separate elements. The first element that I'll talk about here is, how well is your core programming developed and implemented to promote academic progress and promote belonging for students? And there's been a lot of national efforts in this. UDL, differentiation, co-teaching, the high leverage practices. Those things are really around creating a really quality general curriculum experience for students with disabilities. And it is critical for students who have an IEP to be able to be successful and that's because the IEP itself has a limited effect. It's in a sense like a supplemental effect on the general curriculum, not a replacement of it. And through our schools and you'll hear this from our panel as well is a tiered

system of support allowed these schools that were beating the odds to have a system that allowed them to promote high-quality general curriculum, as well as these individualized supports. And the other thing is from a belonging standpoint, if I have a tiered system that is already designed to support students who have intensive needs, maybe more targeted needs as well as some of these core needs, the system was already designed for those services to be delivered. When we don't have a general curriculum or a general system that's responsive to student needs, we often then create a siloed system for students with disabilities. And in a sense, it creates greater disconnect from the general curriculum. And I think the other thing that you'll hear is the importance of a strong tier 1 is really where we want to prioritize our work. One thing that you'll see in one of the other elements is who is responsible for this. And I think this is something that's come up a lot in our work. It used to be that Special Ed was perceived as supporting general ed in the delivery of high-quality curriculum. And in reality, general ed is responsible for the design and delivery of general ed, because students with disabilities are ultimately general education students first and that Special Ed is meant to support the student in gaining the maximum benefit from the general curriculum. But it's not the role of Special Ed to design the general curriculum for those students.

So with that said, we really have this clarity of specially designed instruction and over the course of the life of the center, we've seen a greater focus on ensuring that kids who do have an IEP are simultaneously getting their general curriculum as well as their specially designed instruction and supports. And we know that if we have really great Special Ed but not really great general curriculum then we go back to those progress indicators. What we see is that the kids doesn't make great progress.

If that's the intent of special education, then we want to make sure that we're simultaneously doing both of those. So that gets into this second piece of the general curriculum, it's yes, we have a general core programming that's aligned to the standards, it's using these evidence-based practices and in addition to we will be providing that individualized supports through an IEP.

And what's been really powerful through our work is trying to sort of change our relationship with the IEP. Amy mentioned our strand one is what is the power of it. I think sometimes we've kind of lost sight of it and it's become more of a compliance or form, but in reality the IEP at its simplistic piece really outlines how we're going to help this student maximize their benefit from the general curriculum so they can achieve those state and district and national indicators of progress.

So, what you'll hear in that strand one is there are seven components of an IEP, but really the one that promotes progress is our statement of services and aids. And that's where we start to identify the special education, the related services, the supplementary aids and services and program modifications so students can be successful. And when we start clarifying what it is that we're providing in terms of our individualized supports, we can clarify for the student, these are the dimensions of your high-quality general curriculum, in addition to the individualized supports and services that we're providing.

When we blur those, we make it challenging for parents to really understand how the IEP is supporting their child, and we also make it challenging to clarify the roles of the educators in the system. And when we separate those two, we can clearly see the connection which allows the general ed and special educators to be able to collaborate.

So, this is a tip sheet, and you'll hear about this both in strand 1 and 2 in talking about what those services are. How do we articulate what special education or specially designed instruction are being provided, the related services that are being offered to the student in addition to those individualized supports through our supplementary aid and services.

And in doing that, we talked about that progress indicator, that's where you start to see that the individualized supports supplement the effect sizes that we're getting from the general curriculum. Yes, they'll help students progress towards annual goals, but all of these individualized supports that are provided through special education and in the regular curriculum through supplementary aids and services will help the student achieve this progress in the general curriculum.

So, in a sense, it's this progress in the general curriculum as well as this feeling of belonging within the school community. So in our strand sessions, you'll really see this difference of being intentional about the design of our individualized services. It really helps us create these schools that are beating the odds, because Gen Ed has its effects and through special education really maximizing the specially designed instruction and related services as well as those supplementary aids and services.

Now, the last two elements before I get into our panel are a little bit different. So if you look at the first three, the student belonging, effective general curriculum and individualized supports, those are direct services or direct benefits to the students. The other two, which are at the bottom are really for the educators within that system. And you're going to hear more about this in the panel tomorrow—or the keynote tomorrow, but this staff collaboration really rose to the top as a critical piece. Now as I mentioned at the beginning, we have general education staff and then you have individualized instruction supports and that's where special education becomes a part of it. But it's not that those two instructional opportunities are separate, it's that they're both required for the student to be successful, but the staff that are delivering and designing those services need to collaborate. Because in order for the student to benefit, there needs to be an alignment and coherence between those two types of instruction.

So, this role clarification and you'll hear this from the panel is critical. What we found from our work is that people are not really clear what is my job, what's the job of the related service provider, what's the job of the Para [paraeducator] and when we can articulate those roles, we can do well at our role. When we don't know what we're doing sometimes we duplicate other people or forget to do some of our critical pieces. And it's most effective when the leadership really allocates time. So tomorrow you'll hear from Lead IDEA center, is how do we work with our leaders or how do leaders serve in this role to really ensure appropriate staff collaboration.



And finally, which is really the primary purpose of this event is educator supports. I'll be honest -- educators are the primary impact of student success. Hattie found that about a .32 effect size just from the teacher and that goes back to the relationship, the feeling of belonging, the quality of instruction that we provide, that's how we're going to get our effects. And teachers need to feel supported. They need adequate professional learning and coaching; they need to be able to have these opportunities for staff collaboration. They need access to the right materials. We need to be clear about what we're doing, and we really need the supportive and collaborative working conditions.

So, as we move into the panel, these are the things that they're going to talk about, because from their learning—or we learned from their work that these are the things that make the difference. And at the beginning, this is on that green part that's around the elements, we did identify facilitators for sustainable systems, and we often think about these things as just an essential part of the way we function in education. Having effective leadership, our panel includes three leaders from special education and general ed and being able to clarify what our roles are and how do we maximize the resources, the supports and the knowledge and skills that we have. A big piece as well that you'll hear from our panel and from our other Beating the Odds schools is expectation. Meaning that we believe students with disabilities can achieve similar outcomes both in school and post-school. And if we have that belief then we will make efforts to design systems that allow us to achieve those outcomes. I have already talked about family engagement and its role, but the last two I think are probably the most critical.

You're going to see that through our strands and our breakout sessions, this data literacy piece is helping us be intentional and drive the work that we do both from a belonging standpoint, our panel is going to talk about how they use data to really ensure students felt a sense of belonging, but we also use our data within our general curriculum to ensure that it's accessible and relevant for the students that we're teaching and also for designing and delivering individualized supports. So, making sure that educators have the right data, have the opportunities to review and use that data is necessary for decision-making across all of these elements. And finally, I think what our goal of this work has been to develop collective efficacy, that we have confirmed through our work that no system can do all of it. It can't just be Special Ed, it can't just be general ed, it's not just the leaders' role. It's actually each of those roles within the system that are working together creates this collective effect for our students. So as we go through today's session in our strands and in tomorrow's breakouts, we really try to dive a little bit deeper into these elements, but I think what we can feel comfortable with is kind of identifying the star, like where do we need to be headed to improve outcomes for kids.

So, I want to introduce our panel and once they introduce themselves, I'm actually going to remove the slides, and they'll be able to talk freely. I also want to encourage you at any time throughout the panel to put your questions in the webinar chat or in the Q&A and we will ask our panelists. So, I'm going to first let them introduce themselves.



Ginger Sleep: I'm Ginger Sleep special services director here in Powell, Wyoming.

Tessie Bailey: All right, Kyle.

Kyler Rohrer: Hi, I'm Kyle Rohrer I'm the principal of Powell Middle School in Powell, Wyoming.

Tessie Bailey: And then Chanler.

Chanler Buck: Hello everyone, I'm the Chanler Buck I'm the assistant principal.

Tessie Bailey: I want to give kudos to Powell and we're going to remove the slide and then -- that's me, actually I can remove a slide, but I want to make sure that we have an opportunity to chat freely. So, I'm going to let you guys respond as you want, but I'd like you to just share from your own perspective and your role, how do you see what you do as promoting progress for students with disabilities? So Ginger, I'm going to let you go first as the Special Ed director.

Ginger Sleep: Sure. Promoting special education for students with disabilities is really about teamwork and working with our regular education teachers, para-support as well as our special educators. It's a collaborative effort we're all focused on helping our students maximize opportunities but also expose them to or allow them to have opportunities with their peers as much as possible. There's really that culture of working together for students, but then also really promoting individualized instruction but also specially designed instruction hand in hand. So we have an amazing staff at Powell Middle School and leadership is really pushing us to continue to work together. Kyle and Chanler are a blessing to have as leaders, but it's all about working together for kids and also understanding each individual child's needs and helping them have that sense of belonging.

Tessie Bailey: So, Kyle, I'm going to pass this over to you as the principal and I will say that the Lead IDEA center has identified principals or school leadership as critical for this. So tell us how it works in your school.

Kyle Rohrer: Ginger touched on a lot of the main components and from a leadership perspective, we have a lot of professional development just centered around doing what's best for kids. Collaboration—our schedule lends itself to daily collaboration amongst staff, that includes special education teachers with regular ed as well as counselors and administration. So there's just a lot of brainstorming.

One size certainly doesn't fit all we all know that, but when we're working through situations with any students we continue to brainstorm, what else could we be doing for this child. It never stops with one meeting. So we work tirelessly, we tap into all of our resources with Ginger and the special education department just to continue to strive what that recipe might be to help that student feel that sense of belonging.



Tessie Bailey: I appreciate the foundation you kind of laid there just to try to set that overall environment for what's going to help kids be successful, because it is a huge pie that includes so many pieces and as you were going through that, I was like yeah, it's the whole foundation and culture of the school and the high expectations of the staff that help to bring that sense of environment so a student can feel that sense of belonging. And I think sometimes when you're in the work and you're doing it you know that it's working and part of our BTO was to pull it out and see are we seeing some of those things across other schools so we can help share it with those schools not yet there.

So Chanler, as the assistant principal, how do you work within the system in promoting progress?

Chanler Buck: You know, I think Ginger touched on this, just the collaborative piece of having a vision for kids within our culture or within our community and within our building. If we have a vision, we have an idea that might make this environment more welcoming to kids, more socially and emotionally accepting. They want to come to school. If we have a vision, we're very blessed to have leadership from the top down starting with our board and our superintendent and our district office that supports.

So, every year we have new ideas really that are student driven we open that up to our students to say, what would this look like, what do you want for this school? What do you want for the school year? And if we can make that a realistic goal, we bring that to the board, and they support us in pursuing that. So when it comes to student involvement a sense of belonging the socio-emotional piece, our passion is that an 11 to 14-year-old can walk through the doors every day and truly feel welcomed and want to be here at school and that drives academic success.

Tessie Bailey: So, we've had some questions just if you can describe your school. So Chanler you indicated it is a middle school, but if one of you wants to give the sense of the size, your teachers and the students you have.

Kyle Rohrer: I can jump in on that. I was trying to answer that. Chanler did a good job, but one thing I want to specify when he talks about ideas from kids it seems every year we take a lot of pride we know that belonging is extracurriculars and we have a process where kids write us a proposal and they find a sponsor. So that piece comes from that. We connect with kids about things that we never thought we'd be connected to because they have the trust and relationship and comfort to bring ideas to us and try to help make that a reality and I think that is a huge part of being heard.

A little bit about Powell Middle School, we're roughly about 135 to 140 per grade-level per class. So we're usually between 410 and 420. We're a six-section grade level. So we've got six core teachers and one SPED teacher per grade level. So we have 37 certified and then we have six special education teachers in total, kind of one design per grade level and Ginger can go a little bit more in depth. And then we've got life skills and then we have two different special education teachers that capture some of the students with a little bit higher need. I'm not sure what else I missed. So, I think when we



were looking, I think Ginger shared that earlier, roughly 17% of our students are on IEPs and as we know, not to jump into 504 but that's a rising number that we provide resources for. That gives you a rough look at our numbers.

Tessie Baliey: Something that really rose up in our analysis of your school is the way that you use data and I think all of you have mentioned it, to make decisions about how we ensure that students belong. So I'm hoping you can just share the way that you're using data to be intentional about identifying strategies, which is a question we had, for promoting belonging for students. Chanler, do you want to talk about the survey?

Chanler Buck: I certainly can.

Kyle Rohrer: I think that'd be awesome.

Chanler Buck: So, I know it was in 2018, from a strategic plan when we developed this at the district level, we wanted our audacious goal was to have 95% of our students involved in some capacity or other. That included community programs, and we work really closely with a lot of the community resources that we have available in a small town really, but we have a lot available to our kids. We surveyed our kids to see —we of course know what they're involved with in-house. So if a student is involved in an athletic program or one of the clubs that we offer in our school we know THOETS rosters we know who those kids are, but we don't necessarily know the involvement with great organizations available to our kids in the community. So, we surveyed our kids about halfway through the school year. Three simple questions, really what are you involved in, what outside resource are you involved in, and maybe what do you foresee as a possible future endeavor in school, what can we make possible for you here in the building? We aggregate that data. I go through individual students by name, send that out to grade-level teams and we intervene about halfway through the school year. We know what students are heavily involved with and who may not be involved at all, and then that becomes an informal intervention where we're having conversations around the lunch table, we're catching kids in the hallway we're catching them before and after school. And a lot of that support comes from our counseling office as well. They're having conversations with families and we're getting students connected. Inevitably every year we improve that statistic by 15 to 20% before the school year's over. 95% is pretty audacious as I mentioned. Every year we seem to close out the school year in the low to mid-'90s where's in the past prior to this system, 85 was a good number, but when you have a student, as we all know the research speaks for itself. School culture and just overall climate have been better every year; it's been better every year. So there's more -- it's very much a good system to have in place, but I think what makes it possible is that our staff buys into that and when I send out that information, they're all in. We will talk about it on Friday before the weekend and we know what the game plan is going into next Monday and whether they really have tremendous impact on our students there.



Tessie Bailey: And Chanler or others, can you share about those students who may be in your life skills class and how do those students fit within the work that you were just talking about?

Ginger Sleep: I can. In addition to athletics, we have a lot of clubs that are offered. Kyle had mentioned we put that back on our students where we have an application template where students are asking for permission -- a club proposal, they're asking what's the club name, who's going to be involved, your club sponsor when are you going to meet, how does this promote the mission of our school? And then they run that by me, and we work with each other. I bet -- we've got a lot of staff that are involved in some capacity or another, a lot of our case managers are offering clubs after school whether that's a Legos club or a fly-fishing club and we get those kids involved. Even if it's life skills we've got students that are either involved in those clubs or maybe they're managing and have some other role or capacity in an athletic program.

Tessie Bailey: So, we have a couple of questions, and I want to make sure I can get to them. One is how is the structure of your school's schedule changed or set up to ensure that students can collaborate? And do you provide additional periods per day or per week, or how do you do that?

Kyle Rohrer: If you guys are visual, at some point I'd love to be able to share this. This is something we've worked a lot with other districts as well. So we're blessed to have those six sections per grade level. So if I use sixth grade as an example, first and second period, they go to their electives, and every student has P.E. in our building. We shove about 70 kids into a gym, and the other half are in kind of a explore TI. With that said that provides the final for those grade-level teachers to both have the prep and a team time. So they've got that time for their preparation but then every day of the week they have a designated team time where there's collaboration taking place. We have set structured agendas — on Monday they create an agenda they talk about what they're working on that week, intervention enrichment, students, student struggles, parent contacts, celebrations. We're big with celebrations, we start and end with shout-outs and celebrations because we know it can be a struggle.

And then on Tuesday, admin and counselors teach with those teachers during that same team time that's where we're able to share what we've got going on, as well as answer their questions. So there's just a constant give and take between admin, counselors so we're always talking kids. And then once they've got time for co-content, we have a lot of parent meetings. We really stress parent contacts. So we run through the paces and try to figure out where we are with kids and we try to reach out early and often not too much where you're bugging them but it's good to tap into what we're seeing as far as any questions concern. And again, Chanler hit on this at some point, but a lot of this comes down to recruiting, retaining great staff. The training that takes place, the high expectations, the culture and climate we've created for just a love and care for kids, but then we're also very heavy into PBIS and we're trying to find ways to recognize the great things that our kids are doing. So that's where we take time to write post-cards home to parents, to kids actually, but it comes in the mail celebrating the gains that we're seeing in kids. Because you take some of the most challenging kids, the first three or four weeks and it's amazing that when we continue to recognize the positives, you SHART to change a



kid. Again there's not one-size-fits-all, but time after time, it is just amazing to see how you can win kids over with daily smiles and interaction. It's the little things of how a kid feels when they're coming through the door. Sorry I started to digress.

Tessie Bailey: No there's a lot of kudos for you for what you just shared, because I think that's at the heart of why a lot of us came into education. So Ginger there is a question for you and it's just people are curious, did you see a decrease in maybe the amount of students or the intensity of services that kids needed outside the district as a result of the increased collaborative opportunities set up within the school system?

Ginger Sleep: So as far as our students come to the middle school, we have three elementary schools and one rural school that we all converge in sixth grade. So we had come from a point in time where our students were not actually meeting adequate yearly progress and we really needed to meet together as a team and talk about why our students aren't achieving in the middle school setting.

So, from that basis we really talked about what are the opportunities with their like aged peers because again our experts are our teachers that understand the content, know the expectations but how do we close that gap for our students. And a lot of it came down to their opportunity to be in the general ed classroom. So we have that general consensus and a compelling force to bring everybody together and say everyone has that opportunity and you're going to be supported. You're going to be heard, you're going to be invited, that belonging to be in the class with your peers and we're going to respond by providing support, whether it's a special educator in the classroom having those supplementary aids and services meet them where they're at or it's also partnering with a regular ed teacher we also have some title one paraprofessionals in addition to Special Ed teachers. So, we're all working together whether it's maximizing that time in the classroom with their peers, but then also taking time to provide which Kyle and Chanler will talk about.

They also have a dedicated period to also look at based on the data where are they falling down with that regular ed curriculum, do we need to look at how it's presented, is the content and the vocabulary too difficult, how do we really introduce it in a powerful way for those students? So, it's again a joint effort and they also have an opportunity to receive an even more customized approach during what I need period, which would be special education. It's not siloing them into resource classrooms. Our push is, push them into the regular ed classroom, let's work together to figure out what their individualized needs and customize that instruction and differentiate and then also come behind them or beside them to help them meet those expectations. And everybody's invested in making sure that they achieve, so we're going to give them what I need and we're going to keep coming. We're not going to stop and I think Kyle and Chanler can really talk about we want them to master the content and we have high efficacy and we feel like this is the perfect opportunity is for them to have time with their peers and feel like they belong, that they're heard.



Our annual IEPs too, we are talking with the parents. What clubs are they in, what activities. We're always wanting them to feel plugged in because if they're plugged in, they're going to perform higher because they feel like they have a place. And I think it is all about them getting recognized for their efforts, they belong, they will have a voice when they say they want a club. Even from our IEP meetings we've had oh we don't have that club, maybe you can go to Mr. Buck and propose a new club I bet we could find a sponsor and then they get welcomed. So it's just kind of a cool synergy I believe at the middle school, everybody belongs, all of our students and we'll find a way to still meet the needs of the student based on their disability but also maximize that opportunity with their peers and working to help support our staff as they're working with every child.

Tessie Bailey: I love that. And I think all of you have mentioned the sort of collaboration between general ed and Special Ed, but not all schools have the same buy-in from general education. So can you talk about either from a leadership standpoint or some other activities that you've done that really clarify the role of the general ed teacher or promote buy-in to this idea of promoting progress for students with disabilities.

Kyle Rohrer: Just to give you a little scope of I think Ginger's in year 14 as a special education director so just longevity as far as teachers hear a consistent message, and your kind of just keep hammering that into them. From the opening meeting we're going to kick off, we're going to talk about all kids, the weekly meetings. Every message kind of contains that view, that belief, that perspective.

It's amazing how when you stick to your guns about the type of school and culture and climate you want to create, regardless of kids, the people who don't want to buy into that tend to decide to find their way to an organization where maybe they are more comfortable. So that's the role and job of us as leaders is, if we sense that resistance, we continue to drive home that message and they decide to give into the school. The vision we're creating is that Chanler talked about and we're not very afraid to have that conversation, because the bottom line is generally, we say is what you're doing good enough for your kid? And if it's not, then either you have to step up and we'll support you or we'll support the heck out of you or maybe this isn't the best place. Maybe there's somewhere 30 miles away that would be okay with your views and your perspective.

And jumping back to just the experience with Ginger being in year 14, I can vividly remember when we were having -- we were making more of the movement for inclusion and kind of that -- change is hard and teachers were nervous I'm not sure what that's going to look like so am I going to have enough support, what if, what if and we had to just continue to say we're here, we're here to support you, we know what the research says this is best for all kids. So, I think it's just saddling up next to them and being willing to jump into the trenches and we're just staying consistent with the same message. Leadership doesn't deviate we're not going to talk behind each other's backs. So that's the message, we're not going away, this is how we're going to run this place, and we know what's best for kids and we hope you're all in and we understand if it's not for you. And just to speak to Ginger, I think a lot of times when we're adults when we're trying to get these kids involved sometimes they just don't know



and I've sat in multiple IEPs or just chatted with kids about what about cheer, I see your energy and you're so outgoing and it's crazy how when we kind of show belief and hope in a kid, they're like yeah, maybe I would try that. And that's all they need for that nudge to kind of help the belonging as Chanler sometimes they don't know what they want to do, but if we see maybe an avenue, a trusted adult is sometimes that nudge to go wow they believe I can do that and maybe I will try that. I can't tell you how many times we've gotten kids involved in clubs and activities just by saying I bet you'd be really good at that, you should try that. I'll talk to the teacher, and they'll reach out to you.

Tessie Bailey: And it sounds like, Kyle, at the school, that's also how you talk with teachers, well let's try that and let's look at our data, let's take a different approach. It's a much more innovative and supportive work environment that allows this ability to try things. Is that how you see it?

Kyler Rohrer: It's so true. So we'll have all our staff meeting on Friday and we will talk about failure or failure forward, and we encourage them to try new things, and we'll put it in writing. Sometimes teachers are like but then if it doesn't go right, you're going to be upset with me. Chanler and I in those team meetings we'll bring ideas, but we'll shoot holes in it, what are we missing and we continue to stress how 12 brains are better than two. We need your guidance. So I think some of that humility is a huge piece, but it is encouraging them to let's try something new. A few years ago, we had a motivational speaker, and he talked about how Chanler can speak to it better, but the sixth graders walked on out and said Mr. Rohrer we want to try something new on day one and we were like we're all in. Chanler can speak to that, but we try to encourage that, but we also model that because we're always striving to -- we're trying to get a little better in so many ways feeling the building or clubs or different ways we celebrate kids. So, I think that's kind of that whole circle about just modeling what we want them to do as well. Chanler you could speak to that a little bit.

Chanler Buck: Yeah, forgive me for not remembering the author's name I think it was a why not philosophy. So sitting in that meeting it might've been the day before school, it was probably five years ago and the team of teachers had this vision of what that first day of school would look like for our sixth grade class coming in and the energy just blew up in this team meeting. As I mentioned it was visionary a lot of different what can we possibly do to make this experience not about a syllabus, not about a handbook, not about rules and expectations, but welcoming, energy, and culture. And as we're running these ideas by one another in a collective collaborative setting, we're all in and it was yep, why not. Some messages went out to families right there, we said don't come to your first day of school clothes, wear something comfortable, wear your Powell Middle School T-shirt that we gave you during orientation and was it hard? Yeah. Was it exhausting, yeah. It's become tradition and we don't look back. I was very proud of the team for taking that risk and that was an example that we use pretty regularly when we look ahead for new visionary ideas.

Tessie Bailey: I know we're close to time, but I just have a clarifying question. There's a lot of great work that's happening and given that teachers sometimes feel like they're working all the time, it sounds like your collaborative opportunities occur within the school primarily. You're trying to



maximize the school day to ensure this work/life balance. I don't know if you can speak to that or confirm that that's how you're thinking about the work.

Kyle Rohrer: As much as we can, we have our meetings within the school day. So many of our teachers are involved in coaching and clubs that -- we really try to have our staff out of here by 4:30 at the latest and that's including us. So yeah, I don't know, you're right from a top-down approach work life balance is critical. Chanler's also the AD so he's tried a lot of the extracurriculars after school, but Ginger's gotten creative with her department to have what we call an IEP Day. So once a month, we'll have a bunch of IEPs in one day and we get subs for those teachers. So we'll run them throughout the day as opposed to having a meeting every night until 5 o'clock. That doesn't promote work/life balance. So, we're constantly trying to find ways to not expand their day.

We know that they need that plan and that team time. So we really try to interrupt that as little as possible. The team time is delegated and it's happening within their day, but we know they need that plan time, because you're not achieving that work life balance. I'm a father of three very young busy boys and I coach about everything under the sun so I have to model like I can't be here past 5 o'clock either I've got another life if I move onto if it's not with the kids at school. We also got the liberty if we have to cover for a coach on a PD Day, so we try to be intentional and recognize Tessie I saw that you gave up your prep to help cover band, we appreciate it, thank you. You can't leave kids high and dry obviously but we're trying to show, we appreciate, we notice, we care. So, we want our teachers rolling out of here shortly after the kids feel good about that. That time is critical, and I've been in organizations where you worked them through lunch you worked them through their prep, you work, work and they're gone in two or three years because they're burned out. Basically, we like to think if we hire them, they pretty much stay with us until they retire. There are a few circumstances, but more than not you better make that a good hire because they're probably going to be with you until they retire.

Tessie Bailey: And I think you really highlighted this not just promoting the belonging of students but also the teachers and you're supporting them in a way that allows them to be successful. So, I want to thank you all very much. I want to give you about 15 seconds each to just say what recommendation you provide and then we'll pass it over to Amy to close. So, Ginger?

Ginger Sleep: I think I will find a way to bridge the gap for our students. There's several opportunities in a day, in a school year, but I think it's just starting the conversation, what can we do together for our students so they feel like they belong and that we're going to work together and model that for our students with collaborative effort. So just start the work by starting the conversation, what we can do together for our students.

Tessie Bailey: Kyle?



Kyle Rohrer: Man, I'm just thinking invest in your people. Sorry I kind of got distracted I looked at Jessica's [comment] and said nobody's ever hired me with the intent. And Powell's an amazing place. When I moved my family from Arizona, I was very intentional about where I was bringing my wife and kids to. So I think it's found a place we're proud to invest in in our people. As Ginger talked about, it's with all kids so I think that's a huge one. Then your professional development and a schedule is huge and I don't know if you have teachers or leaders, a lot of times I've worked with leaders around the state it's like let's take a look at your schedule and get curious about your schedule and just wonder with your staff if there's more ways you could be utilizing your time. Because prior to eight years ago we weren't using our time wisely. We found we were wasting about 40 minutes in a day kids had capitalized on kids were kids we were like we need to totally revisit this and the idea of this schedule actually came from a seventh grade social studies wife and he laid it out in front of her and we started doing mixing and matching and I was like that's brilliant. So, it just shows that it's not just the leader's job, it's like this is what we want to do so we got curious about the staff and over time we kind of shaped it into just a very, very efficient schedule. So use of time is huge. It's people and you only have so many hours in a day and how you take care of your people.

Tessie Bailey: Last seconds, Chanler?

Chanler Buck: I think as educators and as coaches we're all going into it for the same reason, and a school year can be exhausting. It can be a lot, January to March and April is a long time for most of us, especially north of the 45th parallel. It's looking forward to going to work every day is very important. Something that's free regardless of the size of your school or the resources available to you is, as a staff make sure you're looking for the right things. Make sure that it's not about correcting student behavior all the time, it's not about just getting to the next bell. You see what you're looking for and I could've probably sat here Kyle and I Ginger from a district perspective could've sat here and talked about our PBIS and positive reinforcement strategies and systems we have in place. But that is so important, it's a vital gain within our culture and it's free, it's free. In team meetings we talk about it every single week and its daily practice where we re-emphasize reinforcing the values and the expectations and the positive things that we see our kids doing every day. And staff also, it's school wide.

Tessie Bailey: Well, thank you both very much. It's been such a pleasure to hear from you. And we look forward to hearing more about what you're doing in the future.

