

# Olympic School District Case Study

By  
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Student work covers the deep blue walls of Sophie Miller's classroom. Two corner bookcases anchor a small carpet with a beanbag chair, while a collection of different-sized tables with chairs defines the students' workspace. Sophie lets out a big sigh as she joins her colleague Robyn for lunch at one of the tables.

My class fell apart today with reading nonfiction. I don't think students understand the idea of audience and persuasion.

As the two ninth grade language arts teachers at Achieve Academy, Sophie and Robyn do a lot of planning and reflecting together. For the past couple years, there has been a growing concern at Achieve, based on MAP scores, that ninth graders don't do enough nonfiction reading.<sup>1</sup> So, the two classes are engaged in a nonfiction unit, including persuasive writing. Students began by reading editorials that Sophie and Robyn had photocopied out of the newspaper.

<sup>1</sup> Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is a state-aligned computerized adaptive assessment program, meaning that test questions are given according to the level of difficulty of students' previous responses. For the past three years, Olympic students in grades three to ten have been tested three times per year in math and language arts.

Sophie is concerned that her students can't articulate what they find difficult about nonfiction and what kind of support they need to better understand it. She gathers information every day, looking for clues in students' behavior and work products, to inform her instructional practice. She tells Robyn,

When things break down in class, it means something, and I have to figure out what.

At the end of class, Sophie had asked students to write brief post-it note reflections sharing one thing they learned about nonfiction writing. Most wrote, "I learned that nonfiction is true and fiction is not true." So basic! Sophie thought the conversation was much deeper but that was their take-away. Her literacy coach was right – she wasn't teaching the reading process as well as she thought she was.

For the past three years, Olympic School District has contracted with an outside organization to provide coaching for some of their language arts teachers and to develop principals' understanding of what good literacy practice looks like. Sophie was part of the first cadre that was coached. She then received coaching during the subsequent two school years and became a lead teacher for summer school. Now she coaches other teachers in her small school, called Achieve Academy, which opened in 2005 when Ravenswood High School converted into three small schools.

Sophie's own practice is still growing, particularly around making data-driven decisions – using concrete examples of student behavior and work to drive decisions about her instruction. Achieve's principal encourages the use of data, and Sophie chose to focus on getting better at it in her classroom this year. Students' reflections about their learning, comments they make in class, and lack of follow-through with assignments are all examples of data. Sophie reflects with Robyn on some of the challenges in using data:

I feel I'm really good in my classroom at using informal data. But, other types of data are available to me, like MAP and test scores... how can I use them to inform my instruction? Or even to help have honest conversations with the kids about the work, where they are, and where they need to be.

Shuffling through the students' reflections, Sophie gets an idea. She had noticed from students' comments during class that they were not clear about how or why people read newspapers and that the photocopied editorials they read came from newspapers. She and Robyn decide that in addition to writing editorials, they will focus the rest of the nonfiction unit on reading newspapers, so students can get a sense of audience and the

purpose of an editorial in context. If it went well, every student could submit an editorial to the school paper (see Exhibit A Final Grading Rubric).

During the next day's class, students re-examine the editorials and identify what makes a strong argument. Midway through the class, Sophie asks students to write another reflection in their notebooks: "What did you learn about editorial writing today?" She is eager to keep students focused on the writing process and the idea of "voice" rather than the specific arguments made in the mentor text.<sup>2</sup> Next she asks them to create a list of issues they feel passionate about. Students spend the final twenty minutes of class writing about one topic from their list.

<sup>2</sup> The mentor text is a piece of writing, in this case an editorial, which Sophie and the students use to examine the writing process.

Moving around the room, Sophie realizes that only two students have done the previous night's homework, which was to collect examples of opinions from sources such as newspapers and magazines. To Sophie, this signals that students don't have a clear idea of what she was asking for.

In reviewing their notebooks that night, Sophie focuses on how they are doing in the writing process and looks for information that indicates where they should go next. An overarching theme is a lack of logic in students' arguments, with no clear line of thought. Sophie's instinct is to return to the mentor text the following day in class. She addresses the students:

All right, ladies and gentlemen, this is a mini lesson. What that means is I have some very specific teaching points for you. I read the drafts of your editorials and, based on what I saw there, I determined that we need to discuss the ways authors build arguments in editorials.

Students move their chairs from the tables into two concentric semicircles facing a whiteboard, which is illuminated by an overhead projector. Sophie walks students through the mentor text, dissecting the structure of the author's argument and looking for indicators of the intended audience. The lesson starts well, but quickly falls apart with students talking and not paying attention. Feeling frustrated, Sophie puts down her pen and solicits feedback from the students.

Apparently this isn't what you feel like you need right now. So, you guys tell me, what do I need to do differently as a teacher?

Put the people who talk too much in back, offered one student.

My question isn't about behavior, it's about learning. What do you guys need as learners to help you understand editorials better?

The students want more time to talk with their partners. They say they're bored with the mentor text and don't understand why they have to read it so many times.

Sophie begins to think that this unit is more difficult to teach than usual, and she's not sure why. She had missed some classes over the course of the month, for a variety of reasons, and she really doesn't have a sense of where the students are in the writing process. She feels stuck in a "reactive mode," doing a lot of assessing in the moment, which Sophie thinks "is the worst place to be when you are using student work to inform teaching decisions."

The students later break off to talk with their partners. Sophie works her way around the

room to meet with each pair. She asks them questions about their writing, their thinking, and their argument, taking notes on each student. She isn't sure what is contributing to the problems she sees. Are they having trouble thinking through their ideas, or are they just too focused on finishing the assignment? Sophie thinks that days like this, when things don't go well, actually provide a lot of information. Listening in on these writing conferences gives her a lot of data to consider.

Sophie drops by Robyn's classroom after school.

The next time I teach this unit I think I'll have the kids do more conferring and talking about their writing. They are so product-driven – they just want to be done. I wish they would focus more on the process.

Sophie wants the students to concentrate more on the process and less on the result. She thinks maybe next time there won't be a final draft at all.

## **A Closer Look at Data**

The district's goal is to improve student achievement as it relates to preparing all students for college, career, and citizenship. Improving teaching is the major strategy to get there, but they don't see that as a goal in and of itself. Superintendent Robert Kessler explains, "The investment in changing instruction is all in the name of improved student achievement in preparation for college." Alicia Pearson, Achieve's principal, perceives her work through this same lens:

If we don't fundamentally change instruction, we are not going to fundamentally improve student achievement. So my goal is to build the capacity of the adults in the building to be steeped not only in the content of what they teach, but in the pedagogical practices needed for students to become independent and responsible learners.

To that end, teachers need to have a discerning eye for what the needs of their students are and be able to build upon their strengths. What are their learning behaviors? Not only does a teacher need to be able to gather and analyze data to make a teaching decision, but [he or she must] be able to plan for each student's needs as well as the whole group.

In her classroom at Achieve, Sophie gathers data through the "assessment-teaching cycle," evaluating what students are able to do using anecdotal information and examples of student behavior. In the day-to-day work with the literacy coach, much of the data collection focused on how students' attitudes about learning and classroom behaviors may have changed. As a staff, Achieve is shifting toward using samples of student work or concrete examples of student thinking, rather than relying on a gut feeling about what is going on. The district provides MAP test data, but in a way that Sophie describes as "not very user-friendly."

Sophie teaches two ninth grade language arts classes, each in a two-block period, and has one release period to coach other teachers. She characterizes her student load as unusually low – 42 students plus 26 more in advisory. She does not have common planning time with Robyn, though most other subject area teachers have time together. That decision, along with the one to block language arts (and no other subject), was made by Achieve's staff. Sophie's language arts classes are taught as literacy workshops, with opportunities for student conferences incorporated into the teaching cycle.

In her teaching process, Sophie tracks the amount of work students turn in and tries to

uncover students' sense of ownership of the work. She has regular one-on-one meetings with students to assess how they are doing and to help them articulate goals for improvement. For example, she asks students to tell her about what they are reading and asks some students to read portions of their book out loud to her. She asks them questions about what they read and looks to see if they are keeping track of their ideas about the reading with post-it notes.

- Talk to me a little bit about what you mean.
- Can you show me a post-it note that points this out?
- Is the reading partner process helping you?
- What are you thinking of reading next?

She wants to understand how much agency students feel and how much accountability they take for their own learning. She wants them to get a sense of empowerment from the conferences and know how they can move forward. She asks students how they can keep challenging themselves. An "A" student might select more challenging books to read and work with his reading partner to identify areas where they want to improve beyond "just getting the work done." She tells a struggling student that he needs to turn work in so she can understand how best to help him.

According to her principal, Sophie's greatest growth in using data stems from her anecdotal notes from these conferences and listening in on students having conversations about their reading. She uses that information to inform her practice. In this way, data is very much at the center of what Sophie has been working on this year. Sophie is beginning to think assigning grades is not the priority; assessing students day-to-day, responding, and building units around students' needs is driving her toward implementing a more competency-based or narrative assessment for students.

Sophie credits the professional development she receives from the district and her principal, Alicia Pearson, as the reason she still teaches at Achieve. But, as she supports Sophie to better tune into her students' learning behaviors, Alicia feels the district is sending the message that "Students have to pass the state standardized test. The test is our indicator of student success," implying that results are more highly valued than improvement.

**Olympic School District at a Glance**

The Olympic Public Schools serve almost 17,400 students in grades K-12. The district is located south of an urban West Coast city and encompasses ethnically and economically diverse communities. The district is committed to redesigning its four comprehensive high schools, two of which have converted to small schools, and has opened two freestanding small schools. In 2007, 54 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and 63 percent of the student body consisted of ethnicities other than Caucasian. Students represented 80 nationalities and spoke 70 different languages (see Exhibit B Olympic School District Demographic Data).

**School Perspective on Data**

Principal Alicia Pearson leads Achieve's staff in using both qualitative and quantitative data to inform their work. For example, teachers had the impression that tardiness was a huge problem, with students habitually arriving late to class. When Alicia brought attendance data to a staff meeting, the teachers realized that the problem was primarily with first period. They gathered more data, including records from one day where they did "tardy sweeps" and wrote down the name of every single student who was late. Sophie recalls, "We had about 61 kids late for first period, out of 350. Then for the next class, we had three. So we said, this is more manageable. It's not like kids are late to

every class indiscriminately.” The staff realized that something else was going on. They learned that some of the buses were coming late and kids didn’t have enough time to eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

Achieve teachers have the opportunity to discuss students at monthly department meetings, monthly grade-level meetings, advisory team meetings, monthly staff meetings, and during daily informal conversations that Sophie feels are inevitable in a school as small

as Achieve. One of the staff’s goals is to create structures for sharing the information. The four language arts teachers are spearheading the work by meeting to discuss, for example, what one noticed about a student as a writer, what that means to his other subject area teachers, and whether his teachers have similar goals for him as a writer.

Achieve teachers collect and use data to identify trends in classes, in grade levels, and in various student populations. Teachers provide progress reports to students every three weeks, even though district policy calls for every six or nine weeks. Alicia has been helping teachers identify what proficiency looks like in each subject area and how to measure it. There is a growing sense at Achieve that

grades are not the right measure. Currently students receive the letter grades A, B, C, and F. But, teachers collectively wonder if meeting standard is an “A” or a “C.” Alicia has been gathering data to make some assertions about the lack of correlation between the current academic grade reporting and students’ proficiency toward standards-based outcomes.

Alicia leads teachers in using a compendium of assessments to see how students demonstrate their thinking in authentic ways. For example, they conducted a school-wide writing assessment and also looked at MAP data to measure growth over time. But while the district encourages this kind of data use, there aren’t structures in place to support it.

As a principal, I don’t have timely or even flexible access to data. I have to gather it from multiple sources and then synthesize it myself, rather than being able to go to one place and pull up the student and see their math, see their [state standardized test] data. I’m not able to enter in any other monitoring information.

Alicia says this lack of access inhibits her ability to look at patterns across her school with regard to truancy, for example, or track data representing individual student’s proficiency in certain skills or concepts. It is also difficult to compile data in the current systems that teachers and school administrators have access to. Similarly, the MAP data goes into a central repository at the district, but it is difficult for school personnel to access the system and get reports back out without assistance from the district office.

### **Making Data a Priority**

Achieve’s emphasis on collecting and using data to inform instruction is attributable to Alicia Pearson’s leadership. On any given day, she can be found walking the halls, checking in with a student about a recent math test, praising another for better communicating her needs to teachers, and congratulating another regarding praise from teachers on his

#### **Achieve Academy at a Glance**

Achieve Academy is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools<sup>3</sup> and strives to provide an equitable education for all students through a rigorous, relevant, and collaborative educational experience. As with the district, Achieve’s mission is to prepare students for work, citizenship, and postsecondary education—for example, all students must apply to five institutions of higher education and for ten scholarships before they graduate (see Exhibit C Achieve Academy Demographic Data).

<sup>3</sup> The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is a national network of schools and centers engaged in redesigning schools to raise student achievement. CES schools share a common commitment to a set of beliefs about whole school change called the Common Principles. Ravenswood High School became involved with CES in 2003 (see Exhibit D CES Ten Common Principles).

oral report. Alicia reports spending about 90 percent of her time during the school day on instructional practice and learning – be it modeling instruction, observing instructional practice, looking at student work, or just maintaining a presence in the halls.

I spend my time on what is most important in the building – helping change instructional practice to meet the needs of kids. And making sure that I'm putting into practice the teaching, the modeling, and the scaffold for adult learning so that this work gains traction.

Alicia developed her leadership style before coming to the Olympic School District, during her tenure in a large, urban district. She started there as a language arts and second-language-learner teacher, but after three years she was released from classroom practice for an entire year to receive extensive training in instructional leadership. Alicia then became principal of the junior high school where she interned. She also did some consulting for the same organization that provides the literacy coaching to Olympic; in fact, Alicia worked with Olympic's district administrators to improve their instructional leadership practice. When Ravenswood High School converted to three small schools, Alicia accepted the principal position at Achieve.

In [my old district] everything was done to teach us how to lead for instructional improvement and how to analyze and use our analysis of instructional practice to make decisions about the adult learning that needed to occur that would enable students to learn and become independent thinkers. I was very steeped in the leadership needed to engage in that work, and I was able to bring that with me. In Olympic there is great energy on the intention of being able to focus on instructional leadership. I believe that at this point in the district, the focus is still on content work around literacy and writing. It is not yet connected to any instructional leadership; as a system, we don't have a common understanding and application of how to lead for improved student achievement.

Alicia leads from the theory, “research-based, practice-proven, value-driven,” meaning that every decision made at the school supports their core values about what is best for students. She encourages teachers to gather data and use that information to make decisions about their teaching practice. They reflect upon their practice, gather more classroom data to see what is or is not working, and build upon that. The goal is for all teachers to continually monitor and adjust.

I encourage the use of data. Not only is it my expectation, but it's a collective expectation among the staff. How that plays out looks different. My literacy staff, with Sophie leading that work, is farthest along in knowing what questions to ask, what data to collect, and how to use it.

Alicia says that teachers have told her, “It used to be when my principal came in he was looking at what I did. And you come in and you're always looking and listening to what the students are doing.” Alicia uses that information as an opportunity to have a conversation with teachers about their practice, asking, “What do you know about your students? Talk to me about them as learners.” A common theme in these conversations is moving teachers away from talking about students' behaviors – for example, the student is off-task a lot – to the evidence of their learning.

While Alicia has the experience and the wherewithal to support her teachers in their work, she would like more support from the district office. She thinks the district has yet to create the policies and systems that show they are serious about the district goal “all students graduating ready for college, career, and citizenship.”

## Pushing for Change

Alicia argues that if district administrators truly intend to make decisions based on what is best for all students, they need to consider a variety of data and cannot take the approach that one size fits all.

Everyone agrees that embedded coaching, not a pullout workshop, is the best utilization of professional development resources. But, when every single school, regardless of whether you're under-performing or high-performing, has the exact same number of embedded coaching days, that's not an equitable distribution of resources. As a district, we need to look at the instructional capability of the principal in the school or the leadership capability of the teachers who are engaged in the practice – that way we can gain traction in the work, as well as replicate and sustain it.

I would think that you reduce or eliminate the coaching at high-performing schools. You put it at a school where there's underachievement, with the understanding that, as that coaching [improves] teacher practice and student learning, you reduce that support, and it goes to someone else. We are still coming back to "if we don't do it all the same, someone is going to be mad."

A lot of the work for me is helping the district to be able to unpack what we mean by "equity." What we mean by "building capacity." [Everyone needs] to share their thinking, then determine a course of action and rationalize it, so that I understand it. That's been my greatest struggle as a leader this year: going back to my staff and owning it in front of them. That can be difficult. I'm very fortunate that I work in a district where I can wrestle with those conversations with my immediate supervisor, with the director of teaching and learning, with the superintendent. That we can get in a room and say, "That's not my definition. That's not my evidence."

Superintendent Kessler understands Alicia's frustration but has not yet figured out how to create a better system for distributing resources equitably. He says,

I think there are some school leaders who, if they were provided a little more autonomy, if we had a little more autonomous culture, they would be able to run with it effectively. For them, by not creating that condition, we are probably impeding them a little bit, or a lot, depending on who they are. But as a system, we haven't figured that out yet. There is still an inequity in the way resources are allocated.

However, the distribution of resources sometimes works in Alicia's favor. She wanted Achieve to have its own summer school, separate from the district. Alicia went to Assistant Superintendent Ruth Gentry with her proposal.<sup>4</sup> "If I have a plan in place to support my kids that has to do with instruction, and I need someone to finally make a 'yes' decision, I approach Ruth Gentry." The district agreed to fund the school. One district administrator explains why:

Alicia made a good case, and we trust her. Plus, the district designated Achieve as a "focus" school. The superintendent wants to support our neediest schools but realizes that we can't support them all. At some point the resources are too diluted. That leads to – not arbitrary – but different treatment.

Designating "focus" schools was one of Superintendent Kessler's strategies to support the district's neediest schools. Decisions were based on both quantitative and qualitative data, such as demographics (free or reduced-price meals and English Language Learners), achievement, leadership, and school circumstances. This last criterion distinguished the three new schools on the old Ravenswood campus, since the superintendent knew that

<sup>4</sup> At the time, Ruth Gentry was not in the chain of command to oversee high schools. Ruth Gentry's title has since changed to deputy superintendent and her responsibilities have expanded to include oversight of the director of secondary schools (see Exhibit E Olympic School District Organizational Chart).

they would need maximum support to get off the ground. So, while other high schools in the district are just as needy as Achieve, they don't get as much funding because they are not "focus" schools.

## **District Perspective on Data**

The district began looking closely at the data from its four comprehensive high schools shortly after the current superintendent, Robert Kessler, came on board as deputy superintendent in 2002. Robert came from a finance and economics background before entering the field of public education in 1994. According to Robert, the data – especially for low-income families and students of color – were "frightening." In particular, Ravenswood High School was in crisis, with large numbers of students dropping out, the largest number of students not passing the state standardized test, and a growing number of poor students (70 percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals). Two of the other high schools were also struggling, and even the best of the group was in the bottom half of the state rankings. Robert seized the data as a wake-up call for the district.

Robert spearheaded the ensuing reform effort in his position as deputy superintendent.<sup>5</sup> Converting Olympic's large, comprehensive high schools into small schools seemed like a promising strategy for improving student achievement. The district developed a set of guiding principles for the conversion efforts that supported teachers, the people closest to the students, in creating the new schools. In May of 2004, Olympic's school board passed the Policy for High School Redesign, which outlined the vision and goals for creating small schools (see Exhibit F Board Policy for High School Redesign). In September 2005, after a year of planning, three small schools opened on the campus of the old Ravenswood High School; Achieve Academy was one of them.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kessler took over as superintendent in July 2005.

Concurrent with the data wake-up call in 2002, the district launched a literacy initiative. This included professional development in conferring with individual students on their work, site-based literacy coaches to assist with modeling quality practice, and external coaches to work with teachers on improving instruction. The principals went to monthly trainings on teaching literacy to develop their capacity as instructional leaders. Each school worked with a literacy coach who was "embedded" in select classrooms, modeling instruction and coaching volunteer teachers in real time. They asked questions in the moment that, according to Sophie Miller, "really helped me see things differently and demystified all the things that go into teaching." District leaders hoped that by "going with the goers," enthusiastic participants like Sophie would serve as models and inspiration for others in the district to join the work.

## **Looking at Student Data**

In the spring of 2007, Superintendent Robert Kessler began doing classroom walk-throughs by himself and with the senior leadership team as a means to build a knowledge set about what is going on in classrooms. He plans to make them a regular part of his staff's agenda next year. Likewise, the incoming Executive Director of High Schools, Isidore Franklyn, hopes to build the professional community between and among the district's high school principals by facilitating walk-throughs in each of the buildings

throughout the coming school year. These activities are designed to provide a snapshot view of what’s happening in classes across the school by having visitors walk from class to class, spending about ten minutes in each of them. After the walk-through, Isidore will lead participants through a formal process to share observations, which might be filtered through the lens of a particular problem of practice selected by the host principal.

The superintendent’s previous experiences with walk-throughs had been focused on identifying best practices and areas for improvement. He believed that if he was going to build system-wide supports, he needed a mental shift in how he thought about classroom activity. Now, his interest in doing walk-throughs is about learning what’s going on and getting his senior staff “connected with what classroom practices look like,” rather than providing feedback to schools about what they saw.

What we know to be true is that the support areas [such as transportation, nutrition services, and facilities] can drive how things happen in the schools in good ways or in bad. The more senior staff members are out in the schools and a part of the conversation, the better off we all are.

### Principles of Powerful Instruction

1. Standards-based lesson design based on the state grade-level expectations
2. High standards of student engagement
3. Teaching transferable skills
4. Teaching for independence
5. Designing lessons to meet the needs of students
6. Data-driven decision making
7. Looking for evidence of student learning
8. Reflective practice in improving our own learning

District personnel concede that the primary measure for student achievement is currently the state standardized test. But, when visiting classrooms, they are focused on other evidence of student learning. Isidore explains, “I listen in when teachers confer with kids to hear what they’re talking about. I listen to what kids are talking about. I’ll look through journals to see what the kids are writing about.”

Isidore says that the district lacks formative assessments and a systematic way to look at student work. The district is, however, beginning to get smarter about the use of school- and student-level data. One area of growth is in disaggregating data to examine individual student progress, which district administrators did to look at who is taking Algebra II. They learned that hundreds of students who had passed the seventh grade state standardized test, and were therefore prepared for algebra in the eighth grade, were not actually taking the course. This data revealed one way that the district was not supporting students in reaching the “college-ready” goal.

## Data Initiatives

Olympic School District has several initiatives in place to get people focused on collecting and using data.

1. Data-driven decision making is one of the district’s eight principles of powerful instruction disseminated by the Office of Teaching, Learning, and School Improvement. According to Ruth Gentry, the district has done a “good job of talking about them with principals and instructional coaches.” But, she adds, it’s up to the principals and coaches to bring the message to teachers.

Isidore Franklyn says that the district hasn’t provided enough professional development for principals and teachers, or held them accountable, for using data.

The expectation is that principals will use data, but we know we haven’t trained them. We don’t have a culture of accountability. As long as they keep coming to all the meetings

saying, “This data is really helpful, I’m going to go back and use it,” [no one will check to see if they actually do it].

In the literacy workshops, because teachers do so much conferring, I think they’re doing a lot of formative assessment. Some schools do a nice job using MAP reports. So, if you’re a science teacher, we can plot out for you the reading levels of all your kids in science. ...We haven’t set the expectation that teachers will use data, and it is anecdotal at best as to who’s really using it. We haven’t done any sort of professional development on what that would look like.

Ruth Gentry agrees that the district is much better at gathering data than using it and that there’s a missing link around how to use the data to change practice. “We haven’t done a lot at a systems level to help with that.”

2. Creating a new Office of Accountability is another indication of the district’s focus on assessment and accountability. The superintendent’s vision for Charles Denton, as the new chief accountability officer, is to provide leadership in helping people understand how to use data. He explains, “When we can get Charles the tools, and he can then deploy them across the system, that’s when we’ll start to see some amazing things happen.” Charles Denton defines accountability as “being in touch with results.”<sup>6</sup> He says,

Accountability gets this bad rap for being heavy-handed. It’s not about that. It’s about being in touch with reality. Not setting up structures and disciplines so that you can just wander through life, through the work, without looking at whether you are meeting your goals. ... It is hard in education to substantiate things and attribute effects because you have so many things going on. There is a discipline to it.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Denton compiled a list of potential high school metrics (see Exhibit G High School Metrics) in an initial effort to determine how the district will track and measure progress toward the goal of graduating all students ready for college, career, and citizenship.

3. To grow a culture of accountability, the district is working with another outside organization to pilot an initiative with four schools this year, expected to expand to seven in 2007-2008. The effort shifts the goal of collecting data from being entirely about external pressure, like the state standardized test, to internal accountability, where schools identify their own measures. The initiative also attempts to vertically align K-12 use of data to assess and address students’ needs. Charles hopes it will streamline accountability systems by combining various year-end reports into one manageable school improvement plan, where improvement is more tightly coupled with data.

Ruth Gentry initiated the accountability work group, but will transfer leadership of the project to Charles. The group consists of a representative from the teachers union, ten district administrators, and school-level personnel from the four schools, including Alicia. This group developed guiding principles for the work, adapted from another district, which the superintendent would like to apply to all areas of Olympic’s work (see Exhibit H Accountability Plan Guiding Principles). Ruth understands that Alicia volunteered Achieve for the pilot in order to help shape the initiative as a way to “protect herself” from the system. Ruth says,

We have very few tools or structures in place to help teachers, such as assessments and rubrics. And because of that, our high school teachers are going ahead and doing good things on their own. I’m sure that those who have taken the time to put [tools or structures] in place are worried about the system coming in and not valuing them or replacing them with something not as good.

4. In an effort to give teachers more access to data on a deeper level, the district has an additional initiative on the horizon. A bond passed last year will purchase a new

student information system and a data warehouse. District and school administrators will be able to analyze student demographic information, student achievement data, and financial data, and make informed decisions at the district and school levels. September 2008 is when the superintendent hopes to have all the schools included in the new system. He expects it will take another year to get more sophisticated about using the data warehouse for analysis.

### **Follow-Through**

The challenge to define, collect, and access data is exacerbated by a pressing request from the school board for information on how small schools are working. Board members worry that the district starts initiatives without first creating indicators for success. The Policy for High School Redesign calls for assessments of student achievement and various stakeholders' satisfaction as a way to determine if the small schools strategy is the best investment of resources. The board is particularly concerned about student outcomes, and they consider lack of rigor to be an issue in the schools. The superintendent feels pressure to get some data back and show results in the 2007-2008 school year.

We've got to determine a set of student achievement metrics that we're going to monitor. Then, how are individual teachers making the progress toward those metrics? The [state standardized test] is not going away, so that will be one of them. But there are the interim assessments like MAP. Are kids gaining over the course of time?

Some of that test data has gone down during this initiative. Not in alarming ways, but when you are trying to build some momentum and support, and you don't have some of those little arrows pointing in the right direction... You only get so many opportunities to do that, then we are going to have to choose a different course.

Board members are frustrated that our results are as sketchy as they are. They're a board that believes in results – they have lots to be frustrated about with this initiative.

While the Olympic School District is committed to the rigorous goal of graduating all students ready for college, career, and citizenship, the district has yet to identify a common definition or understanding of what rigor looks like in the classroom. Nor has anyone determined which data can measure rigor. Charles Denton suggested reporting quarterly grades. At the same time, he knows that he cannot assume Achieve is operating on quarters or that they are giving letter grades. Likewise, counting Advanced Placement (AP) class offerings and test results conflicts with Achieve's decision not to offer AP classes. It is difficult to find comparable data across the district's high schools. Even so, Charles thinks it is an abundance of data, not a lack thereof, which can pose a problem.

You can have so many reams of data that none of it is really helpful. It's just so overwhelming that it becomes pointless. How do we disaggregate in a way that we are paying attention to diversity without putting so much data out there that it just overwhelms people? How do we best personalize and take it to scale?

We have good measures of summative or point-in-time snapshots. We have the ability to track individual kids. But we don't have a real good method for aggregating up the gains.

How the district will measure student achievement is still undecided. Clearly, the state standardized test will remain as one important metric. But, what interim assessments will measure students' progress? How will data be gathered, both informally and formally, and by whom? How will data be disseminated and will it be used?

The superintendent reports that the district uses data now more than ever before, though the culture of accountability is still developing. He acknowledges that a lot more work must be done to train teachers in how to use data to think about instruction. In turn, the district must make all of this data easily available to teachers during the course of their workday. District-level data is not disaggregated for every student group, and the technology is not yet available to make the data accessible to principals and teachers.

The solutions to these challenges may lie in the new initiatives. However, Ruth Gentry says a district evaluation showed “Olympic starts well on things, but it doesn’t necessarily implement well or finish. And it doesn’t evaluate what it does along the line, because it doesn’t implement.” Ruth adds, “We’ve come to the conclusion that we gather a lot of data, but what are we doing with it? What’s going to be different tomorrow? How much deeper do we need to go in the conversation?”

## **The Broad View**

People at all levels of the Olympic School District are talking about data. The district is launching new initiatives and a new structure to take their data and accountability plans to the next step. Sophie Miller uses data to inform her work daily and, in this regard, personifies the direction in which the district would like to move. However, the examples here of how data is collected and used in different parts of the system highlight issues that continue to impact teaching and learning in spite of the increased attention to data-based decision making. What light does this case study shed on system supports for improved teacher practice?

## Self-Study Questions

Questions to consider about the use of data in instructional change:

1. In what ways do *data definitions* match up or vary between and among individuals at different levels of the system?
2. In what ways does the teacher's *use of data* compare to that of her principal, the central office, and the school board?
3. How can the teacher and the central office support one another's different needs for data?
4. What supports or hinders individuals at each level when making data-driven decisions?
5. How would you characterize the central office's method for allocating resources? How does that impact the use of data for instructional change?
6. Given what you now understand about the system, what recommendations would you make to the teacher, principal, central office administrators, or other system personnel about system supports for data use to improve instructional practice and student achievement?
7. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case study and how might they apply to your own work to support instructional change in service of increased student achievement?

**EXHIBIT A - FINAL GRADING RUBRIC**

**LITERACY 9 – EDITORIAL**

Publishable Draft Due: Friday, January 12th

**The Assignment:**

Select an issue about which you feel strongly, write an editorial in which you carefully construct an argument to convince your audience of your point.

**Process:**

- Select a topic about which you feel strongly
- Collect ideas in your writing notes about this topic (opinions, examples, personal experience, information from outside sources)
- Draft and revise your editorial at least two times
- Share your writing in the celebration on the 12th

**Editorial Rubric:**

Assess yourself on the following rubric (use the back of this page to explain if need be)

Category	Exceeds Standard	Meets Standard	Not yet to Standard
Focus/ Organization	My editorial has a clear and focused argument about a single issue/topic. I have clearly developed paragraphs which are carefully organized to have the greatest impact on the reader. My editorial demonstrates clear evidence of a mentor text used.	My editorial has a single argument which is clearly presented to the reader. I have developed paragraphs. I used a mentor text.	My editorial does not have a clear argument/I don't have paragraphs/I didn't use a mentor text.
Content	All of the information presented in my editorial is accurate. My editorial has specific evidence/examples from more than one outside source.	All of the information presented in my editorial is accurate. My editorial has specific evidence/examples from at least one outside source.	My editorial contains only general information on my topic and/or some of the information is inaccurate.
Voice	My editorial demonstrates the use of original and specific language that adds to my argument.	My editorial shows evidence of original language use in an attempt to add to my argument.	My editorial shows no attempt at use of specific or original language or language use distracts from the argument.
Conventions	My editorial is virtually error free.	My editorial contains some errors, but they don't detract from the meaning.	My editorial contains many errors that detract from meaning.
Writing Cycle	My editorial is handed in with at least 2 drafts and with evidence of at least 3 revision strategies used.	My editorial is handed in with at least 1 draft and with evidence of at least 2 revision strategies used.	My editorial is handed in with no or insufficient evidence of the writing process.
Celebration	I share my editorial with my peers at the celebration!	N/A	I do not share my editorial with my peers at the celebration.
Overall	<b>My editorial exceeds standard in at least 4 out of 5 categories.</b>	<b>My editorial at least meets standard in all categories.</b>	<b>My editorial does not meet standard in all categories.</b>

**EXHIBIT B - OLYMPIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Science</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	59%	57%		
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	65%	41%	50%	
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	58%	45%		19%
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	60%	33%		
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	62%	42%	58%	
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	57%	38%		26%
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	73%	38%	71%	28%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Total enrollment (October 2006)	17,360
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	21%
Black	14%
Hispanic	25%
White	37%
<b>Special Programs (May 2007)</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	54%
Transitional bilingual	17%
Migrant	0%
Special education students	12%
Languages spoken	70
<b>Other Information</b>	
Unexcused absence rate (2006-2007)	0%
Annual dropout rate (2005-2006)	6%
On-time graduation rate (2005-2006)	65%
Extended graduation rate (2005-2006)	70%

<b>Teacher Information (2005-2006)</b>	
Classroom teachers	972
Students per teacher	18
Average years of teacher experience	11
% of teachers with at least a master's degree	54
Total number of teachers who teach core academic classes	760
% of teachers teaching with an emergency certificate	0
% of teachers teaching with a conditional certificate	1
Total number of core academic classes	1,737
<b>NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher Information</b>	
% of classes taught by teachers meeting NCLB Highly Qualified (HQ) definition	82
% of classes taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	18
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	76
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	24
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	96
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	4

**EXHIBIT C - ACHIEVEMENT ACADEMY DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
Grade Level	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	57%	18%	61%	12%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Achieve enrollment	350
Ravenswood campus enrollment	1,150
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%
Asian	20%
Black	21%
Hispanic	23%
White	36%
<b>Special Programs (May 2007)</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	59%
Transitional bilingual	19%
Special education	19%
<b>Other Information</b>	
Graduation rate (2006)	94%*
<small>*This number represents students that Achieve Academy inherited as juniors from Ravenswood High School after the conversion and does not account for the students who dropped out as freshman or sophomores, before the conversion.</small>	

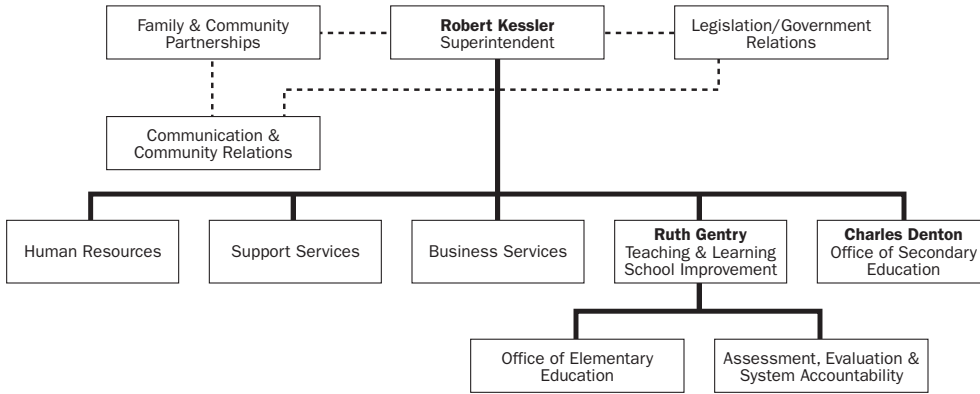
**EXHIBIT D - COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS (CES) TEN COMMON PRINCIPLES**

1. The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be comprehensive if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet those standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation – an "Exhibition." As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of credits earned by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.
7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity, and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.
9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils on the high school and middle school levels and 20 or fewer on the elementary level, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional schools.
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

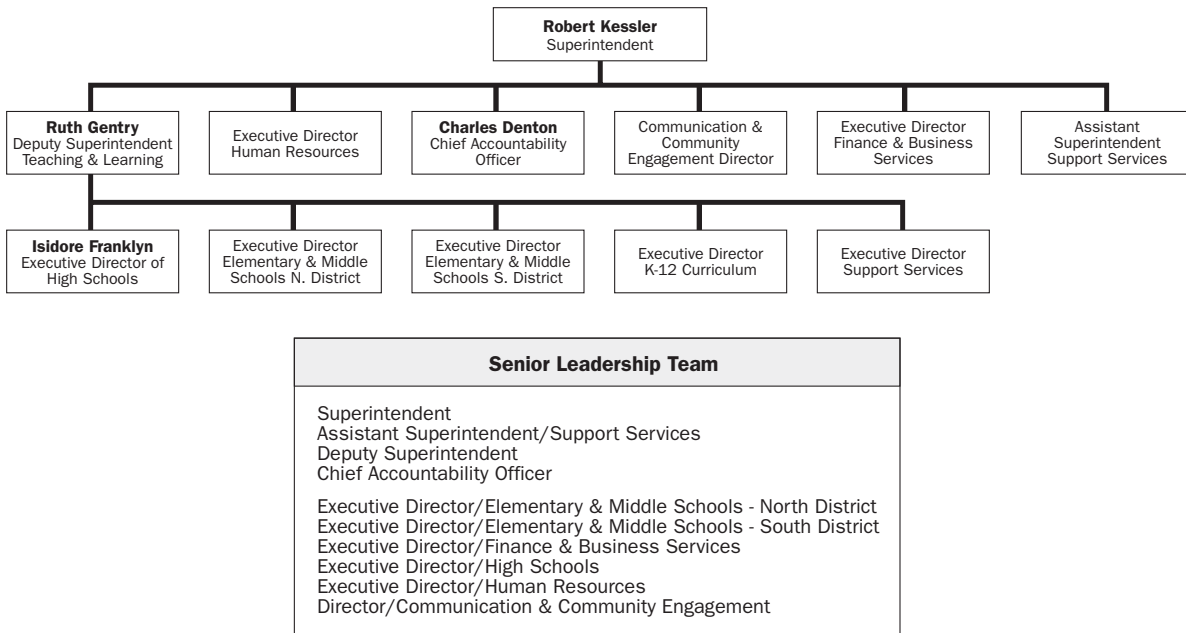
See <http://www.essentialschools.org> for more information

**EXHIBIT E - OLYMPIC SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

**Organizational Chart: 2006 - 2007**



**Organizational Chart: 2007 - 2008**



## **EXHIBIT F - BOARD POLICY FOR HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN: RIGOR, RELEVANCE, AND RELATIONSHIPS**

It is the goal of the Board to ensure that our high schools prepare all students to graduate with a high school diploma and for entry into postsecondary education, career, and the responsibilities of active citizenship. To further this goal, the district's high schools will redesign themselves into smaller learning communities or small schools on high school campuses that emphasize academic rigor, relevance, and relationships.

### **Purpose and Accountability for Results**

- a) The primary purpose of high school redesign is to raise student achievement for all students and close the achievement gap for under-served students by decreasing the size of schools adhering to high academic standards and increasing the quality of choices available to parents and students in Olympic Public Schools.
- b) The Board and Superintendent or designee will be responsible for ensuring community involvement and public understanding of the goals and priorities for developing high-performing high schools.
- c) The Board and Superintendent or designee will be responsible for promoting and encouraging new, smaller learning environments that promote effective relationships, academic relevance, and rigor at each high school campus.
- d) Smaller learning environments must identify measurable student outcomes and outline the method by which student progress in meeting the identified student outcomes will be measured. The measurable student outcomes must address overall student achievement as well as equity.
- e) The District will use an evaluation instrument and/or process to measure and report parent, teacher, and student satisfaction for all schools.
- f) Each high school throughout their redesign process and timeline is entitled to an equitable share of resources, technical assistance, leadership, and support in meeting its goals.

### **Core Guiding Principles of High School Redesign**

The high school redesign plan and the creation of new small learning communities depends on several key conditions. These conditions, as outlined in the policy and sustained by the district, are the important contributing factors leading to the desired results.

**Personalization:** Every student is known well, respected, and appreciated. Emotional and intellectual needs are met. Every student has an adult advocate and a personal plan for progress.

**Equitable, Inclusive, and Multicultural Schools:** Each student's cultural background and experiences are respected and connected to the curriculum. Resources are equitably distributed to ensure success for every student, regardless of background.

**Clear and High Expectations:** High expectations are clearly communicated to all students. Students are engaged in an ambitious, rigorous course of study and leave school prepared for postsecondary education and/or career.

**Authentic Curriculum and Assessment:** Students are challenged to increase and apply knowledge, analyze information, produce quality work, make presentations, and think critically. Teachers and students set learning goals, and students must demonstrate their competency in order to advance.

**Democratic Learning and Choice:** Teachers, parents, and students work together to create a common vision for where the school is going, and make decisions that result in student success. A system of "choice" allows parents and students to choose from the best educational opportunities available to them.

**Distributed Leadership Focused on Instruction:** The school board, staff, and community share responsibility to ensure the success of every student. Schools are given autonomy but are held accountable for enabling all students to achieve at high levels.

**Time and Space for Collaboration:** Staff and students are given the time and space to collaborate and develop skills and plans to meet the needs of all students. Teamwork is expected and encouraged.

**Community and Citizenship:** Parents are recognized as partners in education. Partnerships are developed with businesses and higher education to create authentic projects and opportunities for students. Students become responsible citizens through critical thinking, civic engagement, and an understanding of democracy.

Adopted by the Board: May 12, 2004

EXHIBIT G - HIGH SCHOOL METRICS

Category	Metric	Ongoing	2-4 X/year	Annual	Occasional	District Goals
Student Achievement	Reading			X		According to state law, beginning with the class of 2008, students (state standardized must pass the reading and writing portions of the state standardized test to graduate from high school. Passing the math and science sections won't be required until 2013.
	Math			X		
	Writing			X		
	Science			X		
	Percent passing 3 sections on first try			X		
Course Taking	Percent passing all sections eventually		X			Students' AP and IB test participation will triple between 2006 and 2010 and 90 percent of students will pass the exam.
	Predicted score (using MAP)		X			
	Grades		X			
HS Graduation	Percent of grads taking at least one college level course			X		90 percent of students will graduate on time.
	AP/IB participation			X		
	AP/IB test taking			X		
	AP/IB scores			X		
	Algebra 2 taking			X		
College Readiness	Pre-calculus taking			X		More students will meet Higher Education Coordinating Board standards and 90 percent of graduates will be prepared for college coursework without remediation.
	Percent success in Algebra by grade 9			X		
	OSPI Graduation Rate			X		
	Alternative measures of graduation rate (# of grads, grads/cohort)		X			
SAT/PSAT	OSPI Dropout Rate			X		90 percent of graduates will take the SAT and the percentage scoring 1300 and above will double.
	Percent students up a grade			X		
	Freshman fails		X			
	SAT participation			X		
College Going	SAT scores			X		90 percent of graduates enroll in post secondary education and the percentage of students attending 4-year colleges will double.
	SAT above high bar			X		
	PSAT participation			X		
Discipline	PSAT scores			X		No goal stated.
	2-year remediation rate			X		
	4-year remediation rate			X		
	Percent grads meeting HEC board standards			X		
Attendance	Percent going to college (total)			X		Complete annual online survey with each major constituent group.
	Percent going to 2-year college			X		
	Percent going to 4-year college			X		
	College graduation			X		
Perception	Total suspension/expulsion	X				
	No goal stated	X				
	Disaggregated sus/exp	X				
Student Survey	Number of fights	X				
	Total serious incidents	X				
Staff Survey	Daily rate	X				
	Number qualifying for legal intervention	X				

## **EXHIBIT H - ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **Joint Ownership:**

All adults in the system, from the board to the district office to the schools to the classroom, have mutual responsibility for student success. All levels of the system demonstrate a deep commitment to our district mission and hold one another accountable for results.

### **Multiple Measures:**

No one measure can capture a school or system's improvement efforts. Use multiple measures to identify and inform a fair and accurate means of demonstrating success.

### **Equity:**

In order to ensure high levels of achievement for all students, an accountability system addresses differentiation of resources and supports.

### **Continuous Improvement:**

Isolation is the enemy of improvement. Collaboration, feedback, reflection, and professional growth are the norm.

### **Focus on Student Achievement:**

To prepare students for college, career, and citizenship, we will monitor academic targets (e.g., MAPs, SAT, eight components of power instruction) and other targets that are in service of student achievement (e.g., attendance, school culture, discipline).

### **Congruence:**

District and school initiatives, policies, and practices are aligned with the district vision.