



# Ohio Appalachian **COLLABORATIVE**

Accelerating College/Career-Readiness



**STUDENT MOTIVATION:  
An important focal point  
across the OAC**

## STUDENT MOTIVATION: AN IMPORTANT FOCAL POINT ACROSS THE OAC

“Teachers are the critical component in increasing student motivation in the classroom by engaging and developing rapport with each student. Administrators set the tone and atmosphere of a building and support staff play a positive role as well.”

BRENT TAYLOR, PRINCIPAL, WARREN MIDDLE SCHOOL



### Student motivation matters!

Warren Local School District, an Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC) Straight A district located in Washington County, recognizes this and is seeing how an increased awareness and response to student motivation data is paying immediate dividends. As a result of an investment of time, energy, and passion, Warren’s educators are witnessing how an intentional emphasis on student motivation is resulting in more engaged students and a more dynamic and enriched learning environment. This ongoing initiative is helping inform and connect educators to their students’ interests, and ultimately translates to strong, meaningful relationships among educators and students.



Warren Local has administered The Student Experience Survey to grades 5-12 over the past three years. Results have significantly increased across the district in measures of student hope, engagement, belonging, and classroom management.

Aaron Place, art teacher at Warren High School, shares how this focus on student motivation has impacted his approach in the classroom. “I try to address each student in my class by name each day and have a positive, personal conversation with them that involves their lives outside of school. I let students know that they matter to me and that what they do in my classes not only shows who they are, but also shapes their future. I have seen great improvements by taking this personal approach.”

Educators at Warren Local recognized that an intentional focus on student motivation may lead to improved student outcomes. The trend data they gathered from the annual administration of The Student Experience® Survey (TSE) initially suggested that students didn’t think teachers know where their interests lie. And, taking into consideration the rapidly changing world, being geographically located in an area of poverty, and student interaction beginning to look different in their schools, the time was right to take action.

# 3,511

In the 2016–2017 school year, 669 teachers in 25 OAC districts administered The Student Experience Survey resulting in 3,511 completed surveys.

## Herein is the power of surveying students about their classroom experiences.

Student responses bridge the gap between teachers' intentions and students' perceptions. Student feedback is powerful formative data for teachers.

To get to the heart of what their students were telling them, Warren Local employed a number of strategies. Depending upon the school – elementary school, middle, high – student engagement looks a little different. Each school, however, uses its data to drive decisions on what the needs are and how to deliver on those needs.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At the elementary schools, student engagement looks like “just in time” learning with a 40-minute personalized learning period every day. Student engagement includes enrichment opportunities in addition to targeted intervention that’s structured so that instructional specialists transition to being reading and math teachers. That means that there might be a grade level that typically has three teachers now having six. And, this learning supports small group instruction to meet individual needs.

“One direct change that I noticed right away was high-performing students in groups helping to guide the lower students in the groups. Stronger readers will jump out of their seats to show slower readers where we are while finding text evidence. The students are proud they are contributing to a group effort.”

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LIBBY SWIGER, INTERVENTION SPECIALIST, K–4



### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Warren Local’s middle school student engagement features a jam-packed schedule with electives, such as creative writing, newspaper writing/publishing, and physiology to encourage exploration. In addition, a health/wellness class has been added as part of the elective rotation to help address the life issues that face rural students such as drug abuse, emotional wellness, cyberspace, and social media. And, all grade 7 and 8 students take a Career Connections course to learn life skills.

“I have learned that once the students tap into their own passion in life, their intrinsic motivation for excelling in all aspects in and out of the classroom increases, and they see how successful they truly can be. Passion and enthusiasm are contagious, and my students want to be excited about what they are learning because it leads to a deeper sense of self-worth once they believe they can do it!”

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CONNIE ALLEN, ELA TEACHER, WARREN MIDDLE SCHOOL



**Perhaps the most impressive initiative is the mentor program where more than 30 students are matched with mentors.**

This voluntary program allows any interested middle school student, no matter what their achievement level or demographic, to participate. Mentors are primarily business people who live and work in the community. These mentors receive training that includes, in part, learning what middle school students are like, what to expect from the program, what issues to deal with and not deal with, and program protocols. Ongoing training of mentors is provided via 1:1 personal follow up as well as during quarterly meetings. A pride point for the district is that during the 2015–2016 school year, several mentors followed their mentees from middle school to high school.

#### HIGH SCHOOL

At Warren High School, the concentration is on College Credit Plus course options. Career pathways have been added for students to help guide them in their education and skills acquisition. Warren Local is involved in the High Schools That Work program that aims to improve how high school students are prepared for work, careers, and further education by enhancing curriculum and instruction at high school and middle-grade levels. In addition, a number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are now being offered at the high school to increase student engagement including: Arts and Communications, Vocational Agriculture, Business Administrative Services, Engineering and Science Technologies, and Manufacturing Technologies.

“Overall, providing consistency and modeling expectations creates a positive atmosphere. When relationships are established between students and adults, students want to be in school.”

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BEN CUNNINGHAM, PRINCIPAL, WARREN HIGH SCHOOL



## Warren Local has employed a variety of ways to learn more about and enhance student engagement.

For instance, the district used Thrively to help identify students' strengths and interests. District administrators and teachers are reading *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, a Gallup leadership book, to identify their strengths to help them work better not only together but also with students.

Teacher-based teams are using their TSE results to develop specific actions they will take to address the need to better understand students' interests. Middle school teachers are now much more visible in school hallways when students transition between classes, and they focus on engaging with students by greeting them by name and asking them how their day is going. At the high school, the social studies teachers have taken a popular "music approach" to student engagement and relationship-building. They have chosen the music that is played during class changes that is reflective of their own tastes and high school experiences to connect with their students.

"I always knew that personal relationships were key to student motivation. We just have to take the time to really get to know these kids and to know their needs."

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ANGIE ERB-GENTILE, WARREN HIGH SCHOOL, ELA TEACHER





Another OAC school district, Crooksville Exempted Village School District, has become more student-centered by meeting individual needs, adjusting schedules, and listening to student ideas, concerns, and positive feedback about what makes the day more productive and engaging. This approach has improved the overall school and district culture, and each school has seen sizable increases in their The Student Experience Survey results on student hope, engagement, belonging, and classroom management.

Over the past three years, the percentage of positive responses from Crooksville students have more than doubled in areas such as:

- This teacher knows about my interests.
- In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise from this teacher for doing good work.
- We care about each other in this class.
- I can find lots of ways around any problem in this class.
- This teacher makes me excited about the future.



To get there, monthly professional learning sessions with all teachers—embedded in the school day—were held. The agenda included sharing TED Talks, YouTube videos, and current research on student hope and motivation. To keep the conversation alive between each professional learning session, an “article-to-go” for teachers to read at their leisure is provided which then informs discussion at the next face-to-face meeting.

To foster relationships between teachers and students, the Crooksville High School building-level team has developed a number of clubs—cooking, gaming, technology, fitness, leadership, career exploration, college exploration, film, etc.—that give students the opportunity to explore their interests during the school day. Teacher interests are also surveyed to match with student interests and to make teacher advisor assignments to the various student clubs. The clubs meet every two weeks.

“At Crooksville High School, we have noticed a significant positive change in our students’ behaviors, attitudes, and motivation as a result of our student-centered opportunities. Our entire building is now working collectively to provide the best possible experience for our students in the classroom and through additional in-school and after-school activities. Students are more self-motivated to strive for better results, and hold each other accountable.”

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KEVIN SMITH, PRINCIPAL CROOKSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL



Developing this positive culture at each school to foster student hope, engagement, and belonging, also led Crooksville school leaders to re-define their approach to schoolwide discipline issues. Each school now implements a positive, rewards-based approach. For example, being sent to the principal's office in the K-8 building oftentimes may mean that you are being rewarded for positive actions. According to Principal John Toeller, "Our goal is for school to be the best eight hours of the day for our kids."

At the high school, a tiered-reward system includes both individual rewards for positive actions, grades, and discipline as well as a whole class competition. Recent results include a senior class with no discipline issues.

While Crooksville educators have done an amazing job in meeting their students' needs, it's important to keep in mind that the process of building student motivation takes time. And, it must involve all stakeholders, including the district-level team, building-level teams, and teacher-based teams. It can also be messy work—tackling difficult family situations, dealing with poverty, and becoming an advocate for the student.

### Student Motivation Really Does Matter

Both Warren Local and Crooksville educators have embraced the fact that student engagement and feedback can provide new insight into the classroom teaching and learning experience. When combined with other measures, student feedback can be a powerful tool to inform teacher practice, improve outcomes, and increase student motivation and thus the overall learning experience for students. These schools, along with many other Ohio Appalachian schools, are realizing the power and promise of building strong relationships with students that ultimately leads to higher levels of student engagement and motivation.

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