

## Making Academic Gains By Engaging Families and Community

### DISTRICT PROFILE

**Metro Status:** Urban  
and Rural

**Total Schools:** 28

**Grades:** PreK-12

**Total Enrollment:** 12,700

**Eligible for Free or Reduced-  
Price Lunch:** 52%

**Special Education:** 14%

*“We have seen an increase in our reading, our science, and our math. Our graduation rate has gone up; the dropout rate has gone down. Over the years, we have seen a lot of great things happen in our system that go back to this relationship with ICLE.”*

### GOALS

- Increase the graduation rate.
- Create a scalable and sustainable plan to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to close the achievement gap.

### CHALLENGES

For several years, Cabell County School District (CCSD) had been seeking to address ongoing concerns about student performance in the district’s two high schools and career technical center. At 77%, the district’s average graduation rate lagged behind the state average of 84%. CCSD had not made adequate yearly progress since 2006 and there was a persistent gap between the percentage of educationally advantaged and disadvantaged students achieving proficiency on the West Virginia Educational Standards Test (WEST-EST II).

Facing stagnant WESTEST proficiency scores and an entrenched culture of low expectations, CCSD needed a partner to jumpstart district reform and to help enlist the support of parents and community members so that the quality of education across the district’s high schools could be improved.

### SOLUTION

#### ■ Increasing the Rigor and Relevance of Instruction

In the fall of 2009, a group of about 40 teachers from the CCSD high schools then attended training to learn how to write effective lessons based on the Rigor/Relevance Framework. These teachers became trainers in their schools. They began working to incorporate differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and stretch learning into every classroom.

The district made a specific effort to build increased relevance into the curriculum at the School and District Career Technical

Center (CTE) programs. Aided by policy guidelines developed by their ICLE coach, the committee succeeded in instituting a board policy allowing students to earn credit through out-of-school learning experiences. As part of the reform plan, the schools began reaching out to local business and community leaders, and the Career Technical Center instituted a full-time community liaison to build relationships with businesses. This effort yielded valuable opportunities for CTE students to develop their skills in real world settings.

### ■ Improving Communication With Families and Community

In an effort to reach out to parents, CCSD schools to quickly communicate urgent information, and increased use of podcasts to transmit information about district activities. Schools provided training for parents on how to utilize a learning community management system that offers technological tools (e.g., grade books, information portals) to increase parental involvement in schools. CCSD also ensured that all schools had websites so that families could easily access updated information regarding staff e-mail addresses, school calendar information, and scheduled events.

*“Kids are feeling more connected to their schools because they’re doing something that is relevant to them.”*

### ■ Strengthening Family and Community Engagement

The district began encouraging teachers to use Instructional Support and Enhancement (ISE) days for home visits and parent-teacher conferences. Parent conferences were arranged to be held in the evening so that more families could attend after school hours. When teachers needed to conference with families of at-risk students, the parents were invited to meet with all of the students’ core teachers together during a common planning time. The district worked with parents and with the local court system to develop new strategies for addressing persistent attendance problems.

To extend the reach of the school district into the community, community groups and business leaders were invited to be members of district planning committees such as the high school restructuring committee. District initiatives and concerns were also communicated through community forums. Schools were encouraged to form school and community support groups, such as academic booster clubs to provide extra enrichment for students.

## SUCCESS

Through their partnership with ICLE and collaboration with families, community members, and local business leaders, CCSD experienced impressive academic gains during the 2009–2010 school year. Such gains were evidenced by the overall improvement in the number of schools meeting AYP, growing from 73% in 2009 to 81% in 2010. In addition, the graduation rate increased from nearly 77% to 84%. It is expected that with increased AYP and graduation rates, progress will be made in closing the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged students in coming years. Partnering with ICLE helped all participants, through the creation of an empowered environment, to see themselves as part of the solution.

