

SCHOOL PROFILE

**Colby Middle School
N 2nd St.
Colby, Wisconsin**



Type of School: *Middle School (Grades 6-8)
Location: *Colby: Located in central Wisconsin
*Rural: Population of 1500
Size: *Approximately 249 students
*One instructional team of 5 teachers for each grade level
Student Population: *Majority of students are Caucasian
*10% of student population has an identified disability
*All students are full-time in general education
Principal: *Liz Sheridan, for three years
Teachers: *A mix of new and experienced teachers in the building

Summary of Classrooms, Teachers, and Students in the Research Study Colby Middle School – Colby, Wisconsin

Spring 1999:

Grade: 6th, 7th and 8th Grade Art
Teachers: Mrs. Skwierazynski
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 13 students

Grade: 8th Grade Social Studies
Teachers: Russ Alman
Target Students: Female student with physical disability

1999-2000 Academic Year:

Grade: Middle School—Geography
Teachers: Russ Alman
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: Mr. Alman’s geography class is one of the Encore classes

Grade: Middle School—Spanish
Teachers: Ms. Siefert
Target Students: Whole class observation

Grade: Middle School—Health class
Teachers: Mary Beth Guy
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 20 students total, 11 boys and 9 girls

Grade: Sixth grade science class
Teacher: Mrs. Marcott
Target Students: Small group of students in computer lab
Class Make-up: 9 students total, 5 boys and 4 girls

Grade: Eighth grade language arts
Teachers: Anna Kaiser
Target Students: Whole class observation

Grade: Middle School Student Council
Teachers: Anna Kaiser’s classroom
Target Students: Student council members
Class Make-up: Mix of 6th, 7th and 8th graders

Grade: Middle School—seventh grade math class
Teacher: Mr. Hagen
Target Students: Whole Class Observation

Grade: Middle School—resource/enrichment class
Teachers: Mrs. Kirker
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 6 students total; 5 boys and 1 girl

Grade: Sixth grade science
Teachers: Mrs. Marcott
Target Students: Whole class
Class Make-up: 24 students total; 13 girls and 11 boys

Grade: Sixth grade science (2nd class)
Teachers: Jim Sturzinger - special education teacher
 Mrs. Marcott
Target students: 6 students with special needs, 2 are CD, 2 are ED, and 2 are LD.

Grade: Seventh grade science
Teacher: Mrs. Wysocki
Target Students: Whole class

Grade: Middle School—Geography
Teachers: Russ Almann
Target Students: Whole class in computer lab
Class Make-up: 20 students total; 11 girls, 9 boys. 1 with ADHD, 1 with CD

Grade: Middle School—health/phy/ed. class
Teachers: Mary Beth Guy
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 20 students total

Grade: Middle School—reading project
Teachers: Mrs. Diedrich - math teacher
Target students: Whole class
Class Make-up: 13 students; 10 boys, 3 girls

Grade: Sixth grade language arts
Teachers: Mrs. Severt
Target students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 19 students, 10 boys and 9 girls

Grade: Sixth grade math
Teachers: Mike Werner
Target Students: Whole class observation

Grade: Seventh grade pull-out math class
Teachers: Vicki LaVenture

Grade: Eighth grade science class
Teacher: Marshal Kaiser
Target Students: Whole class observation

Fall 2000:

Grade: Seventh grade social studies
Teachers: Mrs. Steward
Target students: Whole class observation

Grade: Eighth grade language arts
Teachers: Anna Kaiser
Target Students: Whole class observation

Grade: Eighth grade math class;
Teacher: Mrs. Diedrich
Target Students: Whole Class Observation

Grade: Sixth grade general music
Teachers: Chorus teacher
Target students: Whole class observation

Grade: Seventh grade science
Teachers: Mrs. Wysocki
Special education aide
Target Students: Whole class observation; Kessy with severe ED

Grade: Sixth grade language arts
Teachers: Martha Praefke
Target Students: Whole class observation

Grade: Eighth grade science class
Teachers: Marshal Kaiser
Target students: Whole class observation

Grade: Eighth grade guidance class
Teachers: Mrs. Wussow
Target Students: Whole class observation; Crystal severe CD
Class Make-up: 22 students total; 10 girls and 11 boys

Grade: Seventh grade social studies class
Teacher: Mrs. Steward
Target Students: Whole Class Observation; Taylor, student with severe ED

Grade: Seventh grade math class
Teachers: Mr. Hagen
Target Students: Whole class observation;
Class Make-up: 24 students total

Grade: Sixth grade math class
Teachers: Mike Werner
Target Students: Whole class observation
Class Make-up: 21 students total; 12 girls and 9 boys

Grade: Seventh grade “Teen Issues” class
Teachers: Mary Beth Guy, teacher
 Also student teacher from UW-Stevens Point
Target students: Whole class observation

Grade: Middle School—sixth grade science class
Teacher: Mrs. Marcott
Target Students: Whole class observation; Justin and George
Class Make-up: 21 students total; 11 boys and 10 girls

Researchers who observed and recorded data

Paula DeHart Spring, 1999 – Fall, 2000
 Kim Beloin Spring 1999
 JoAnne Suomi Spring, 1999

People Interviewed

1-11-00	Liz Sheridan	School Principal	Interview by: DeHart
2-18-00	Anna Kaiser	Eighth Grade Teacher	Interview by: DeHart
2-18-00	Lisa Kirker	Special Educator-Grade 8	Interview by: DeHart
2-18-00	Jim Sterzinger	Special Educator-Grade 6	Interview by: DeHart
2-18-00	Mary Wussow	Special Ed. Teacher’s Aide	Interview by: DeHart
2-18-00	Mike Werner	6 th Grade Teacher	Interview by: DeHart
3-10-00	Diane Hanson	Teacher’s Aide	Interview by: DeHart
3-10-00	Mandy Hornick	7 th Grade Student	Interview by: DeHart
3-10-00	Matt Oehmichen	8 th Grade Student	Interview by: DeHart

3-10-00	Brittany Stock	6 th Grade Student	Interview by: DeHart
3-10-00	Jill Subera	7 th Grade Student	Interview by: DeHart
3-10-00	Joanne Kaiser	Parent	Interview by: DeHart
5-4-00	Nancy Clasen	Parent	Interview by: DeHart
5-4-00	Dana Degroot	Parent	Interview by: DeHart

Curriculum:

Integrated grade level units

High degree of technology integration

Advisor/Advisee program

Encore program with a variety of class choices for students

EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY:

- Teachers met in the summer to create a school-wide advisory program.
- A cross-grade student council makes decisions on fund-raising, drug and alcohol awareness, monthly community service projects and social activities.
- Grade-level teaching teams make all curriculum decisions.

INCLUDE ALL:

- All students with disabilities are included in general education classes full-time.
- One special education teacher is assigned to each grade level house to consult and support students at that grade level.
- Students with disabilities are proportionately assigned to each of the general education classrooms. (Students with disabilities are occasionally clustered for specific classes when a teaming arrangement has been set up between the general education and special education teachers.) All classrooms serve a heterogeneous group of students.
- Multi-age Encore classes are offered weekly and include all students.

TEACH & ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY:

- Appropriate accommodations and modifications for students with and without disabilities are made by classroom teachers or the special education teacher when team teaching.
- No specialized or different curricula are used for students with disabilities. All students participate in the general education curriculum with adaptations and modifications.
- The middle school curriculum, philosophy, and structure supports a diverse range of interests and learning styles.
- Students with disabilities are included in all testing and assessment.

BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING:

- In many classes, students work in partners or in small groups, using peer support models.
- Each grade level team has an hour of planning time together each day where the team decides on where support is needed that day due to the content being covered and students' needs.
- Additional school staff are also used as team teachers and supports, including the librarian, the computer teacher, the occupational therapist, etc.
- Special education staff assist all students, not just those with disabilities.
- The Senior Tax Exchange Program allows senior citizens to volunteer their time in the school and get property tax credit in return.

PARTNERING:

- There is a strong parent connection through the Booster Club and Parents Club.
- Students help seniors in the community during activities such as "Make a Difference Day."
- The library and computer lab are open certain nights of the week for community use.

Introduction

Colby Middle School is a rural school with a fairly homogeneous population of students with and without disabilities. Colby Middle School was chosen as a research site because the school community exemplifies the five principles of Whole Schooling in its own unique, yet effective way. This school profile will provide specific examples illustrating how the Whole Schooling Principles are implemented across age, grade and ability levels.

Principle 1: EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

The first principle of Whole Schooling is to help students to function as effective citizens in a democracy. Because of the important role schools play in teaching essential participatory skills and in perpetuating democratic ideals, Colby Middle School was examined for its nurturance of democratic decision-making. The examples below are taken mainly from interviews and observations over a two-year period of time. When looking at the many examples, several main themes or findings emerged.

Finding 1: Committed respected school leaders support the school community in democratic decision-making.

Liz Sheridan is the principal at Colby Middle School and started her tenure the same year the Whole Schooling Research project began observations in the school. While Ms. Sheridan was new to Colby, she was not new to the profession, having a great deal of prior experience both as a teacher and administrator. In conversations with Ms. Sheridan and teachers in the school, it came across clearly that she was a strong supporter of the middle school concept including an emphasis on cohesive grade level teams, a strong core of academic subjects, an advising program to provide support to students, and a variety of opportunities for students to explore athletic, social and academic activities that are not part of the core curriculum.

Observations and interviews revealed that most decisions made at Colby Middle School were made by either the grade level teams or the school steering committee. Each grade level team consisted of both general and special educators and the team made decisions for the students in their grade level including appropriate placement, curriculum, academic support and behavioral interventions. One teacher described his experience with team decision-making in this way, “I’m comfortable with the team decision-making process, we are all supportive of what the team decides; there is no backbiting once a decision is made. We all agree on that and that is what I like about this school.”

The School Steering Committee at Colby Middle School had control over many school decisions that were not made by the grade level teams. The steering committee met every two weeks and included representatives from each grade level, special educators, teachers of special areas like art and music and the school principal. Decisions made by the steering committee ran the gamut from school attendance policy to coordinating food sign-up for the next staff get-together. While the steering committee had regular members, a teacher on the committee explained that, “Anyone is welcome to come and sit in.”

Overall, school staff appeared to be very satisfied with the power they had over decision-making in the school. One teacher's comment expresses the general consensus about Ms. Sheridan's approach to decision-making:

I think she (the principal) is excellent. She does a very nice job of sharing decision-making. Through our steering committee, she is a member, but she doesn't chair it. It is a very discussion-based committee. Probably shared decision-making is her strength. She works to build team leaders in the grade level teams and she also works to develop student leaders. She will present ideas to the teams and then let the teams work through it.

One issue that was raised in interviews that might warrant further examination has to do with how special education policy issues are decided at Colby Middle School. While decisions in other areas appear to be left to grade level teams and the School Steering Committee, there was the perception on the part of some of the staff that special education policy decisions were made by administrators over the summer without the input of teaching staff. This may or may not be an issue that the Colby Middle School Community wishes to explore further.

Finding 2: Students are involved in leadership roles and decision-making.

Since the teaching of democratic skills and principles is such an important function of schools, all of the schools in this study were examined for the ways in which they encourage students to take on leadership roles and make decisions in the school and classroom. In Colby Middle School, student involvement in leadership and decision-making took three forms. The first form was the involvement of students in the schools' student council. Colby's student council was quite active and raised money for charity organizations, planned school events, and organized community service projects. In one observation of a student council meeting, a group of five students was talking to the rest of the student council about donating some of the council's funds to UNICEF. After the small group made their presentation, the full group discussed their proposal, a vote was taken and it was decided that the student council would contribute money to UNICEF. In general, the student council meetings at Colby Middle School were run by students with minimal input from the faculty advisor.

The second form of leadership and decision-making activities observed at Colby Middle School was student participation in the development of classroom discipline policy. One of the classroom teachers showed an observer the discipline plan her class had created. The teacher explained that developing the plan started with a discussion of "Above the Line" behaviors and "Below the Line" behaviors, which helped students to think about the kind of classroom they wanted to have. Next the students created a list of statements that spelled out expectations for behavior like "Every student is responsible for completing their own work on time." Along with the general statement of expectations, the students listed specific behaviors that were consistent with the general statement and consequences for not behaving in an appropriate manner.

Students also had a role in the school wide discipline plan called STEP. In the STEP program, students move through a series of disciplinary steps, the third of which is a call home to the parents. Once the parents are contacted, a meeting is set up to discuss the problem. The student who is experiencing the problem conducts the parent meeting, explains why the meeting was called and describes the plan she/he has developed for changing the behavior. In this way, students were encouraged to see themselves as having control over and responsibility for their actions and the power to make changes that will keep them moving in a positive direction.

The last area where Colby Middle School students got involved in decision-making and leadership was when they had the opportunity to choose instructional and other special activities in which to participate. Consistent with the middle school concept, Colby offered a variety of academic, athletic and social activities in which students could choose to participate. Some of the choices included special interest classes called Encore classes, football, basketball, track, National Honor Society, Future Farmers of America, band and choir. Student interviews revealed that students appreciated the many opportunities the school offered as one student shared when she was asked what was good about Colby Middle School. She stated, "I think they offer a lot of good opportunities for students like Women in Science Day. They offer camps and give us information about things like science and athletics. I belong to band and choir and basketball."

Since student leadership and decision making is so important to the democratic process, it is recommended that the Colby Middle School staff continue with their efforts in this area and look for additional ways for students to make decisions and be leaders in the school.

Finding 3: Schools grow and change quickly, but schools reform slowly.

The one rapid change that Colby Middle School experienced occurred just before the Whole Schooling Research team began conducting observations in the school and that was the hiring of a new principal. While the hiring of a new principal has the potential for creating a huge barrier to school reform efforts that may have been taking place in the school, this does not appear to be a problem at Colby Middle School. The principal of the school before Liz Sheridan was hired had a strong commitment to the middle school concept, which Liz shared and continued to promote. Teachers noted some differences in leadership style between Liz and the previous principals, but the way decisions were made, core school policies and structures, and the strong emphasis on grade level teaming was not impacted in any significant way. Colby Middle School can serve as a model for other schools in the process of hiring a new principal in that they may want to search for an applicant whose beliefs match the core beliefs guiding reform efforts in the school.

Finding 4: School leaders promote and believe that continual staff development, research, and collaboration improves the quality of education for all.

There is solid evidence that school leaders support staff development, research and collaboration at Colby Middle School. As mentioned previously, Colby Middle School has a strong grade level team structure with each team including both general and special

educators. The work of the grade level teams was supported by school administration through scheduling, as time was scheduled into the school day for grade level teams to meet. The team meeting time was in addition to time each day for individual teacher planning. Grade level teams were observed using the common meeting time in productive ways as they planned integrated units, discussed student needs and problems, and negotiated the distribution of time and materials. The decisions made by the grade level teams were supported by school leaders and the teams projected a strong sense of efficacy.

There was also evidence that school administration at Colby Middle School supports professional growth opportunities for teachers. One teacher said of Liz Sheridan's support of staff development, "The principal is very forward thinking and I don't think she has turned down someone who wants to attend a workshop." This same sentiment was echoed by another teacher who had attended a summer workshop put on by the Colorado Earth Science Institute that showed teachers how to do a variety of hands-on activities with rocks and minerals. The school district had supported the teacher's attendance at the institute and classroom observations revealed that the teacher put what she learned at the workshop into practice. She said, "I just love teaching at Colby. I drive from Mosinee (40 miles from Colby) every day just so I can teach here." She said that the district had been very supportive with funds and materials and sent her to a variety of workshops like the one she attended on rocks and minerals.

Another indication that school leaders at Colby Middle School were supportive of professional development was the support Liz Sheridan gave to teachers who worked during the summer to develop a new Advisor/Advisee program that had been started in the school. Ms. Sheridan said that money had been put aside to pay the teachers for the time they put into creating the new program called SUMMIT (Successfully Uniting Many Minds in Trust). An important factor in helping teachers to feel like professionals is to give them time and financial support for developing curriculum and creating new programs rather than assuming that teachers should be willing to donate their personal time to such endeavors.

One last indicator of the willingness of school leaders at Colby Middle School to support professional development, research and collaboration is their participation in the Whole Schooling Research study. Ms. Sheridan and the staff at the school opened all aspects of the school's operation to close scrutiny. The attitude of the school community was that they were proud of the good things happening at Colby Middle School and they wanted to share this with others who could benefit from their example. School personnel also expressed a desire to receive feedback that might help them be even more effective.

Finding 5: Diversity across ethnicity, SES, culture, ability, etc. is accepted and valued.

Diversity in the traditional sense of the word, which usually means race, was not very evident at Colby Middle School. Colby is a small, rural Wisconsin community and the majority of the residents are Caucasian. This is not surprising because six out of the eight schools were located in rural and suburban Wisconsin, where there is very little racial

diversity. The homogeneous nature of the Colby community is reflected in the student population. While there was little racial or cultural diversity in the school, there was a situation that arose that demonstrated a willingness on the part of the staff to accommodate diversity. During the time of the Whole Schooling research study, a student who spoke only Spanish transferred into Colby Middle School. The school was not set up to handle a non-English speaking student, but they acted swiftly to help the student feel included. The school's technology person loaded a program in the computer lab that allowed the student to translate between Spanish and English and at the end of this study, the principal was in the process of investigating other assistive technologies to support the student's successful transition to an English speaking environment.

While there was little racial or cultural diversity evident at Colby Middle School, a form of diversity that was clearly valued at the school was support for inclusion of students with varying disabilities and special needs. Students with special needs were fully included in general education classes and modifications and accommodations were carried out so smoothly that it was very difficult to identify students with special needs during classroom observations. General and special education teachers worked closely together, often team teaching in the general education classroom, to help to ensure that all students' needs were being met. The example of embracing students with special needs that was set by teachers and administrators in the school also filtered down to the students. General education students and students with special needs were frequently observed doing group projects together and working very well together.

The acceptance that Colby students had for students with disabilities, even those with severe disabilities was illustrated in a guidance class. A student with severe CD (functioning at a 6 month level) was a part of the class and the guidance teacher was discussing what students in the class might feel self-conscious about. She said that Chrissie, the student with severe disabilities might feel self-conscious about being in a wheelchair because she was the only one in a wheelchair. The guidance teacher asked if students in the classroom would stare at Chrissie and the students in the classroom immediately responded, "No." The guidance teacher said, "People in this room would not stare at Chrissie because we are so used to her being in a wheelchair." The natural way that students with disabilities were included in all activities at Colby Middle School contributed to this high level of acceptance on the part of the general education population.

Finding 6: Students, Teachers, and parents are encouraged and empowered to develop their true selves.

As mentioned previously, teachers at Colby Middle School were supported in democratic decision-making and encouraged to grow through professional development opportunities. The teachers were also encouraged to cultivate their skills and talents and contribute these talents to their grade level teams, which seemed to bring out the strengths of each teacher. As a result, teachers in the school were willing to take risks and try new teaching approaches, worked to include all students in their classrooms and expressed a great deal of job satisfaction.

Like the teachers at Colby, students were also observed in decision-making and leadership roles that helped them feel empowered to develop their true selves. Previous examples were given of students leading student council meetings, making decisions about discipline and behavior, and choosing academic and other special activities in which to participate. Some of the activities that students could choose to participate in included special interest classes, athletic teams, band, choir, academic and athletic camps and community service projects. All of these activities help students discover skills and talents they possess that might otherwise remain hidden in traditional academic classes. The importance of having these kinds of varied experiences was noted and appreciated by students. Several of the students interviewed talked about the different clubs, athletic opportunities and special interest classes when asked what was good about their school.

Principle 2: INCLUDE ALL

The second principle of Whole Schooling supports instructional practices where all children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender and age. This principle is exemplified through different examples at Colby Middle School. The following findings will illustrate the different ways that school staff worked to include all students in their classrooms.

Finding 1: Students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.

Colby Middle School practices full inclusion of students with emotional, learning and physical disabilities. Students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities are also included when it is felt that the students will benefit from the activities occurring in the general education classroom. The following quote by a general education language arts teacher explains the approach to inclusion that is commonly followed in the school:

We have total inclusion. The special education teacher and I team-teach at times and we work together to modify. Some of the students with special needs I modify for, others I don't. The students are doing a paper right now and for some of the students they will write fewer words. If a student needs a test read to them, we'll do that. For the short story assignment, we've divided the class half and half so we have smaller groups. That way it isn't the special education kids in one class and the other kids in the other. The special education teacher is in my class the whole time.

As this quote highlights, general educators and special educators at Colby work closely together, frequently team teaching in the same room, to facilitate full inclusion and to provide accommodations and modifications where needed.

One particular observation seems to encapsulate the way school faculty at Colby Middle School work together to meet the needs of all students. The observation took place in the school computer lab and a group of students were in the lab writing a research paper for science class. The general education science teacher was in the lab along with the sixth grade special education teacher who was working not only with students identified as having special needs, but anyone who needed help. The computer lab director was in the

lab doing some of his own work and helping students, and the aide from the library, which was located right next to the computer lab, was also in and out of the computer lab helping students. With all of the help students had available to them, the observer was quite surprised when a fifth adult walked into the lab and started working with two students in the lab. The science teacher explained to the observer that the fifth adult was the school physical therapist who, when she learned that the class was working on keyboarding for the research paper, said she would work with the students who needed her services in the lab. At Colby Middle School, this kind of team approach to including and teaching all students was the norm rather than the exception.

While Colby Middle School had few students with severe disabilities, there were examples of these students being included in the general education classroom. One young female student named Chrissie was identified with severe CD and functioned at a six-month level. This student regularly participated in a general education guidance class, where students explored issues of self-concept, peer pressure, problem solving and life decision-making. In one classroom observation, the students were participating in an activity where they were exploring self-concept and discussing things that made them feel self-conscious. The students had written a list of items on a pair of construction paper glasses that described what made them feel self-conscious. Chrissie's parents had helped to write a list on Chrissie's glasses and one of the items was that she felt self-conscious about being in a wheelchair. The guidance teacher asked if people in their classroom would stare at Chrissie and the students responded, "No." The guidance teacher went on to say, "People in this room would not stare at Chrissie because we are so used to her being in a wheelchair, but if she gets in another setting, people might stare at her." Based on observations of interactions in the class between Chrissie and the other students, the guidance counselor's comment about Chrissie's acceptance in the class seems very accurate. Although Chrissie had no verbal communication with other students, she was included in all group activities and students were observed holding her hands, asking her questions and exploring toys and manipulatives with Chrissie that were often attached to her wheelchair.

In contrast to the strong support for inclusion that permeated the school, there were doubts expressed about inclusion by some of the faculty. In one example, a special education teacher was observed conducting a pullout math class for three students with learning disabilities. At the end of the lesson the teacher said, "This is the situation where I really question full inclusion. I don't know what these kids would do in the regular curriculum." This same sentiment was expressed in other interviews of teachers and parents and is something the Colby Middle School Community may want to continue to discuss and explore. While there were numerous examples of students with special needs being effectively included, meeting the needs of all students is an ongoing process that warrants ongoing conversation and in-service training.

Finding 2: Inclusion is valuable for kids with disabilities.

Students with disabilities were observed experiencing great success at Colby Middle School. In most classroom observations, it was difficult to identify students with special needs because they were actively participating in all aspects of the general education

curriculum. In one classroom, students worked in small groups to create a persuasive video on protecting an ocean animal. As part of the presentation, students researched background information on the animal and then described ways that humans negatively and positively impact the animal's existence. During a presentation by three female students, the special education teacher who was conducting the class, wrote a note to the observer indicating that one of the girls in the group read at a third grade level. The observer had to ask which student it was because it was impossible to tell. The special education teacher said that with the right kind of activity and the opportunity to rehearse the reading this student did very well. In this same class, another student identified as having special needs created a persuasive videotape on sharks. He had a set of shark teeth and a poster with a picture of a shark on it. He talked about how the shark was often hunted and killed because people believed that sharks were very dangerous. He explained that it is not all that common for people to be attacked by sharks and that they were being killed unnecessarily. He looked at the camera and encouraged people to save the shark. Again, unless the special education teacher had told the observer that this young man had learning disabilities, the observer would not have been able to tell.

Teachers at Colby Middle School had high expectations for students with disabilities in contrast to schools that put students with special needs into pullout programs and don't expect them to achieve at the same level as general education students. One special educator expressed her beliefs in this way: "I probably don't have any students who like me because I make them tow the line. I want these students to succeed in high school. If they don't learn that they have to get their assignments done they aren't going to succeed in high school. Traditionally, special ed. kids don't graduate, and I want every one of my students to graduate. They might not like me now but hopefully at some point they look back and know what I did for them." As this quote demonstrates, teachers in the school believed that students with disabilities could be successful in the general education curriculum and provided many supports to ensure that this success was achieved.

Parents spoke of the value of Colby Middle School's inclusion policies for students with disabilities. One parent of a child with special needs said, "I know this year kids are not pulled out of the class, so they get everything [all curriculum], they get to learn from kids who do know the answer." Another parent expressed delight over her daughter's success in one of the general education classrooms, she said, "She (her daughter) isn't even in a special ed. class and she is doing so well she surprised her teachers." One last quote by a parent expresses the same support for inclusionary practices, "I like the way the school tries to include everyone. Not just the athletes or the intellectual elites, but for everyone. I like the way they integrate the special education kids with the regular classes. Then all of our kids grow up on the same level. All of the kids respect each other."

Not all comments by Colby Middle School faculty, parents and students were supportive of inclusion for students with disabilities. One teacher expressed his reservations this way, "I have mixed emotions about inclusion. I don't have mixed emotions about the term or the philosophy, but I do get uncomfortable when it is the only game in town. We don't have any study halls. If you have kids with a 70 IQ, if his day is just crammed with activities, where is he going to get the time to work on the things he needs?" Another

teacher said, “People with disabilities are not fully included in the real world, so should they be included 100% in school?” One of the student interviews also revealed some negative feelings about inclusion with this comment, “Sometimes the special education teachers do too much for kids, like type up a whole paper. If kids don’t want to learn, they aren’t going to learn, you can’t do it for them.” With all of the evidence suggesting the benefits of including students with disabilities at Colby Middle School, it is not suggested that school faculty question the implementation of inclusion because of a few negative comments, but this is an area that probably warrants ongoing examination and conversation.

Finding 3: Inclusion improves the educational experience for all kids.

There were many examples at Colby Middle School of inclusion benefiting all students. One example is a special class called Excel that was provided for eighth grade students during the last class period of the day. Excel was led by a special education teacher and the purpose of the class was to provide a study hall period for any students needing extra help. Although it was conducted by a special education teacher, it was open to any students, both general education and special education, who needed help with assignments. During an observation of an Excel class, students were seen getting help with a social studies project for which they were creating maps and timelines; working on graphing calculators and being sent to the computer lab to type a paper with a word processing program. The general education teachers expressed appreciation for the Excel class and said they were able to recommend it to any of their students who needed help with schoolwork.

Another way that inclusion improves the education experience for all students is a result of the teaming approach used by general and special educators in the school. Since the special educator at each grade level is usually team teaching with one of the general education teachers in the general education classroom, the ratio of pupils per teacher was lowered. This means all students receive more attention from teachers. In addition, all of the special educators in the school adopted an attitude that they were in the classroom to help any students who needed it regardless of whether or not the students had been identified with special needs. One special educator was asked during an observation in the school library if there were specific students doing library research that she was helping. Her reply was, “I work with everyone.” This was an attitude toward learning that permeated Colby Middle School.

Finding 4: Inclusion provides positive, proactive supports for students.

Some of the positive, proactive supports inclusion provides for students at Colby Middle School have already been mentioned. These include the teaming of special and general educators, which lowers pupil to teacher ratios; the Excel class that provides extra assistance for any students who need it; and the strong student focus the staff in the building have where they see it as their job to help all students. In addition to these supports, teachers in the school were also frequently seen incorporating group projects and peer teaching. Like the persuasive video project that was described in a previous section, students with special needs and general education students worked together on

high interest, highly engaging activities. The motivating nature of the assignments helped students with special needs to succeed and also the social and academic supports they received from peers. One teacher said in his reading class he likes to pair students with special needs with general education students so the general education students can “serve as a good model for writing.”

The students with special needs and the general education students seemed very comfortable working together. They completed major projects together and interacted on a day-to-day basis. In one classroom observation, a student identified with ADHD worked quietly for the full class time on a social studies packet. When he was finished he put his assignment away and then asked the girl sitting next to him what words they needed to look up for the next day. The words had been listed on the board and then erased. The female student read the words to the student with ADHD and he wrote them down in his notebook. In schools where pull out is the norm, a student with special needs might be reluctant to turn to a classmate for help, not knowing what kind of reaction she/he might get. At Colby Middle School, students with and without special needs frequently turned to peers for help and support.

Finding 5: Inclusion promotes the natural distribution of students.

General and special education staff at Colby Middle School worked hard to distribute students with special needs naturally throughout the classrooms. At times this presented challenges because of the team teaching approach used by special and general educators. While school staff believed that students with special needs should be distributed evenly, there were also advantages to putting more students with special needs in classes that had both a general and special educator. The school staff constantly work to achieve balance between keeping students with special needs naturally distributed and giving them the support they need. Some of the ways this is accomplished is through the use of teaching aides in classrooms without a special educator; having general education teachers with special education certification who can make any needed modifications for students; and implementing motivating curriculum and assigning high interest projects to reduce the need for modifications.

One practice that seems to contrast with the natural distribution of students that is generally seen in the school is the advisor/advisee program called SUMMIT. For the SUMMIT program, small groups of students are assigned to one faculty member in the school so that there is one adult they know they can turn to. The SUMMIT groups meet regularly and discuss issues of concern to the students. To keep the pupil to teacher ratio low, all school staff are tapped to serve as advisors, including special education teachers and teachers of specials like art, music and physical education. At Colby, each special education teacher has their own SUMMIT group consisting mainly of special education students. School staff may want to examine the desirability of grouping the special education students together with a special education teacher to determine if the pros of grouping the students with special needs together with a special education teacher outweigh the pros of distributing students with special needs evenly throughout the SUMMIT groups.

Principle 3: TEACH AND ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY

The third principle of Whole Schooling promotes the philosophy and practice of designing instruction for diverse learners that engage them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities. One method for supporting this principle is by developing accommodations and adaptations for learners with diverse needs, interests, and abilities. The following findings and examples illustrate how Colby Middle School implements this principle.

Finding 1: Instructional practices are responsive to learner’s needs, interests and abilities.

There were many opportunities at Colby Middle School to observe instructional practices that were responsive to learner’s needs, interests and abilities. One such practice that has been discussed in depth in previous sections is the creative way staff and volunteers are used to increase the number of adults in a classroom and reduce the pupil to teacher ratio. At Colby, grade level teachers team together, general and regular educators work together in the same classroom, and aides and volunteers help out in classrooms to provide support for students. This creative use of staff is particularly effective for meeting student needs, which explains why in classroom observations it was so difficult to identify students with special needs and those without. The teachers worked together to make accommodations and modifications where needed and classroom instruction flowed smoothly.

Another way Colby Middle School staff geared instructional practices to respond to student needs and interests was through the variety of special interest classes, clubs and athletics the school offered. One example of a special interest class that was observed at Colby Middle School was called “Gross and Not So Gross Anatomy.” This was a nine-week class taught by the eighth grade science teacher. In the class that was observed, students learned how to take their blood pressures and learned what blood pressure readings indicate about human health. The teacher explained that as part of this class students study about the human heart and brain and then dissect cow hearts and cow brains. It is not surprising that the gross anatomy class was quite popular with middle school students. Other classes that were offered like Gross Anatomy were “Battle of the Books,” where students read and discussed adolescent literature and a class on weather watching.

Another special program offered to students at Colby Middle School was called Encore. The Encore program took place during the last class period of the day and everyday students engaged in different activities. One of the days, students wrote in personal journals, another day was devoted to sustained silent reading. In addition, Thursday was devoted to intramural sports and Friday was a fun activities day. The health teacher described a class she offered as part of the Encore program called “aerobics.” She said the class ran for six weeks and that she did three weeks of Tai Bo, two weeks of step aerobics and one week of floor hockey. She said that students enjoyed the different aerobic activities and were inspired by the example she set. She said students look at her and say, “Well, if you can do it, I can do it.” Not only is a class like aerobics focused on

the interests and needs of middle school students, the activities experienced by the students can help to shape lifelong health and exercise habits.

Students expressed a great appreciation for the variety of special interest classes, clubs and athletics offered at Colby Middle School as expressed in the following student interview:

[Colby Middle School] has all of the sports activities. They have a lot of them; football, basketball, track. And they have a lot of clubs you can join, like National Honor Society, FFA, band and choir. There are a lot of activities in the school you can join. I am in band and choir. I am in National Honor Society. They always have class trips and I enjoy those. They have something called TRACKS and you earn points to go on a trip. They go to Washington D.C. and this year I will be going.

Offering a wide variety of activities to adolescent students is consistent with the middle school philosophy, which says that students at this age should be exposed to numerous social, academic and athletic opportunities to broaden their horizons and develop interests that may last a lifetime.

Finding 2: Motivating instruction reduces the need for individual accommodations.

Offering motivating instruction was a real strength of Colby Middle School. Observations documented the widespread utilization of high interest curriculum materials, classroom activities and student projects, which resulted in a high degree of student involvement and little need for individual accommodations. Motivating instruction was observed in all subject areas and at all grade levels in the school. The following paragraphs will describe a small sampling of the kinds of activities that were observed.

A specific example of a motivating student assignment that took place over a sustained period of time occurred in a sixth grade science classroom. The activity was part of a larger electricity unit and students had been asked to work in small groups to construct their own electricity projects. The groups had developed an amazing assortment of projects. One group built a model of a lighthouse with a light in it that went on with a switch; another group constructed a haunted house complete with a fireplace, spider webs and ghosts that lit up; a third group built a model boat with an electric propeller that moved it along in a tray of water; and a fourth group created a merry-go-round with horses that went around with a flip of a switch. These projects obviously took quite a lot of time to construct, which meant there were fewer science topics covered, but students ended with a thorough understanding of how electricity works. The student groups included general education students and those with special needs. As far as identifying those with special needs, it was nearly impossible. All students were equally involved in constructing the projects and all students were able to articulate how electricity powered their creations. Of this science classroom a special education teacher who worked with

the sixth grade team said, “For the most part, this class has so much hands-on work that my students do very well.”

This is just one example of a motivating science lesson and there were many observed at Colby Middle School. The science classes involved students in experiments and projects where they worked in much the way that real scientists work. Students were seen testing and identifying rocks and minerals, engineering their own genetic creations called “Reebops,” classifying fingerprints, using Geiger counters, studying and creating flip books on body systems and conducting pond studies. In all of the activities observed, students with and without disabilities were involved and were successfully completing the activities with few adaptations.

In another example of motivating instruction, a language arts teacher incorporated student self-knowledge into an electronic portfolio project that was required of all eighth graders. Prior to starting the electronic portfolio, each student had completed three different personality inventories; “True Colors,” one similar to Myers-Briggs, and a third one related to Multiple Intelligences. The students used the computer program “Hyperstudio” to create an electronic page for each of the inventories and a description of what they had learned about themselves from completing the inventory. The teacher explained that the purpose of the activity was to have students develop a portfolio they could continue to add to throughout the remainder of their middle school experience and take forward to high school. The teacher hoped that completing the personality inventories would help to give students insight into how they learn and how they relate to others. During the course of the observation, the teacher explained that both students with special needs and those without were completing the electronic portfolios. The observer noted that all students were highly engaged in creating their portfolios and was unable to identify which students had special needs.

One last example of a motivating instructional activity that was observed occurred in a social studies classroom and revolved around family history research. Each of the students in the class worked with family members to create a family tree diagram, identify cultural heritage and describe other interesting facts about their family history. The social studies teacher worked with the computer lab director and other teachers to develop a family tree template that students could complete on the computer. The social studies teacher said she had been doing family history projects for many years, but noticed that the quality improved dramatically when she started using the family tree template. She said especially for students who struggle with fine motor skills and writing, just drawing and labeling the family tree took the entire time allotted for the project. Now with the template, students could fill in the family tree information quite easily and could devote the rest of their time to finding out more about their family history. The finished projects were mounted on colored tagboard and looked very professional with the family tree diagram printed out by the computer. Students added items like old black and white photos of family members from generations past with labels providing information about the photos. An observer talked to a student who had been identified with severe emotional problems and frequently refused to participate in class activities or had to be removed for inappropriate behavior. This student was asked

what he had learned about his family. He said, “It’s a long story,” and then went on to tell everything he had learned about his family.

Finding 3: “Authentic” curriculum and instructional practices are implemented (Authentic: Involving the construction of knowledge; disciplined inquiry; value beyond school).

For the purposes of this study, “authentic” curriculum and instructional practices were defined as those that involved the construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry and value beyond school. There were numerous examples of authentic instruction and curriculum observed at Colby Middle School.

The first area where authentic curriculum and instructional practices were observed was science. Because of the investigative, experimental nature of science, this subject seems to easily lend itself to the use of authentic practices. One example of an authentic science project observed at Colby Middle School, was a pond study that was observed in an eighth grade science classroom. To conduct the study, students walked to a pond near the schools and completed a series of experiments on the pond water like measuring temperature, oxygen content, nitrate content and ph levels. Students also studied signs of life in the ponds like populations of frogs, insects and fish. The main objective of the pond study, which was conducted in the fall and spring of the school year, was to determine the health of the pond and the environmental factors impacting the level of health. Clearly, students were constructing knowledge about the interrelationship between humans and the natural world; were involved in sustained, disciplined inquiry as they conducted scientific tests on the pond water and analyzed results; and were gaining skills and knowledge that had value beyond school as they learned about how personal decisions they made affected the ecology of the world around them.

Authentic curriculum and instruction practices were also observed in social studies classes. The traditional fact and lecture-based approach to teaching social studies was rarely seen at Colby. One example of authentic instruction that includes many of the discipline areas of social studies is a Festival of Nations project that students completed in a seventh grade classroom. The students were asked to choose a country to investigate and as a part of that investigation to create a landform map, a mobile, a replica of the country’s flag, a grocery bag backpack for a trip to that country, three recipes from the country and a Hyperstudio presentation. The Hyperstudio presentation had to include a map of the country, the flag, the national anthem, products of the country, national resources, something about the people and any other things they found interesting. This project fits all of the characteristics of authentic instruction. Rather than memorizing random bits of information about countries of the world, students constructed deeper knowledge of one specific country and put together a presentation on that country to present to the teacher and their peers.

Hyperstudio presentations were also used for an authentic project in an eighth grade language arts classroom. The project was done around the time of the last presidential election and the language arts teacher had students work in small groups to investigate one of the presidential candidates. Students were required to do a title card, a table of

contents card and two biography cards. They also had to research their candidate's position on five different issues and make a card for each one of the positions. The presentation then had an end card and a bibliography card. Through completing the Hyperstudio presentation students got an in-depth understanding of a presidential candidate's background and political position.

In this same language arts class, students published their own magazines. Students were required to include an editorial, a news article, an interview and advertisements in their magazines. The students were able to choose whatever theme they wanted for their magazine and then were to interview someone who has expertise in the theme area. For example, one student chose "Fitness" for her theme and interviewed one of the coaches at the school to talk about fitness. At the end of the magazine project, which was done on computer, students had a finished product that looked very much like a professional magazine.

Another example of an authentic language arts project was a persuasive video that sixth grade students were asked to complete. The project was part of an integrated ocean unit and students chose an ocean animal about which to create a video. In the video, students gave basic background information on the ocean animal and then urged people to engage in activities that would help to protect the animal from destruction and extinction. The students not only learned science content with the research they conducted on the ocean animal, but learned the art of persuasion and the skills of effective video production. During one of the video presentations, the special education teacher who was teaching the class about persuasive video production, explained to the observer that one of his students who read at a third grade level was part of the group presenting. The observer could not identify which student it was. The special education teacher said that with the right kind of activity and the opportunity to rehearse the reading, this particular student was very successful.

Math is probably the subject area most likely to be taught in a drill and skill manner, yet authentic math practices were observed in Colby Middle School. In a seventh grade math class, students were observed learning how to use spreadsheet software on the computer. One student was observed inputting basketball statistics for different basketball players including two and three point baskets, free throw attempts and percentage of free throws made, number of games played and average points per game. This student explained how he had transferred the statistics from a piece of chart paper to the computer and how he had created formulas for doing all of the calculations. In a sixth grade classroom, students were also observed participating in authentic math activities. The class session that was observed was part of an integrated ocean unit in which all of the sixth grade teachers and students were participating. For the math component, students researched and wrote reports on specific kinds of whales. Math was integrated throughout the whale presentations as the students presented statistics on the size of their whale, its life span, the distance it travels and how much it eats. Some of the students created graphs to visually represent these statistics.

Finding 4: Instructional practices integrate curriculum.

As discussed in previous sections, Colby Middle School has cohesive, collaborative grade level teams that work well together. The integration of content and skills across discipline areas was greatly facilitated by the positive working relationship within the teams. Each of the grade level teams was observed doing at least one major integrated unit that included a variety of subject areas. The eighth grade teachers created an integrated unit on Native Americans, the seventh grade teachers developed a unit focused on the ocean, and the sixth grade teachers worked together to develop an animal research project for students. For the animal research project, students chose an animal they wanted to learn about in the science class and then learned how to write a formal research paper on their animal in the language arts class. The final step of the project was the integration of technology as the students used word processing software to type up their final paper. Participating in the integrated units was such a powerful and memorable experience for Colby students that it even came up in a student interview. A student in the school stated, “The integrated units are so good. We are doing a states project right now and I think it is so good. It just integrates everything. It interlocks all fields into one. It helps you to see if maybe you might want to be an historian when you grow up.”

A second form of integration that was frequently seen at Colby Middle School was the integration of technology into the classroom curriculum. Students were often seen using computers to locate, organize and present information. Colby students were often observed using programs like Power Point and Hyperstudio to complete class projects. Several student assignments produced on Power Point and Hyperstudio have been described in previous sections including a Festival of Nations project, a presidential candidate presentation and an electronic portfolio project. Colby students were also seen using the Internet to locate information for research reports on topics like the Olympics and . What is worth noting about the ways technology was used in Colby Middle School was how naturally it was used to support learning. Rather than a separate area of study, technology was used as a powerful tool to facilitate learning in the core subject areas. Like the integrated units, the effective use of technology was noticed by students. When asked what was good about his school a student responded, “We have a really big library and nice LMC. They changed the computers so they are really nice and up to date. I work on the computers all of the time. They [the teachers] try to have our work revolve around the computers so we get to know how to use them.”

Finding 5: Major determiners of learning; Relevance of curriculum; Attendance; Participation; Classroom management; High Expectations; Accountability; Time on task; Completion of work.

There were many factors that influenced the degree to which students were encouraged and able to learn in the eight research schools. Many of these factors have been covered in the previous four findings, particularly those that focus on the importance of high-interest, motivating and authentic curriculum practices.

One factor that played an important role in student learning at Colby Middle School was the statement of clear expectations. Stating clear expectations for what students are to

demonstrate or accomplish was found to be extremely important for students with and without disabilities. Some of the ways in which Colby teachers communicated expectations to students was through stating them verbally, writing them on the board and building them into grading rubrics. Communicating clear expectations to students was facilitated by the Agenda books (daily planners) they were required to carry and use. In the Agenda books students recorded assignments and expectations for every class they attended. Teachers were very faithful about writing assignments and due dates on the board because they knew students needed to enter them in their Agenda books. The Agenda books also provided a tool for parents to monitor their child's learning and assignments. Of the Agenda book a teacher commented, "Parents really should never complain that they don't get enough information. If a parent really cares they can see by looking on the Agenda how their child is doing. The grades for all of the assignments are written in. We require the students to fill in what they have to do in each class and parents have to sign it. If they have something they haven't finished then they get that highlighted in the agenda book and then we can tell by the number of highlights how many assignments have not been completed."

Grading rubrics were also used effectively to communicate expectations to Colby students. This was particularly true when the grading rubric was given to students at the beginning of an assignment or unit of study. An example of how a grading rubric was used effectively was with the persuasive videotape they were required to complete in a sixth grade classroom. The grading rubric with clear expectations for what the persuasive video needed to include, was given to students at the very beginning of the assignment. Students could refer back to the rubric as they worked on their projects and then the teacher reviewed the rubric again just before the persuasive videos were presented to the class. Having clear expectations was especially important for students with disabilities who faced many challenges in completing class assignments. Several students with special needs were seen successfully presenting persuasive videos in this classroom, complete with all of the required components that were highlighted on the grading rubric.

A final instructional factor that played an important role in student learning at Colby Middle School was the modeling done by teachers. Colby teachers frequently talked through critical steps in decision-making to assist students in achieving success. In one classroom, a teacher talked through what students needed to do to complete a research paper by the due date. She said, "What I expect to have tomorrow is all of your research completed and your outline started. Tomorrow, you'll be finishing your outline and finishing your rough draft. Now think to yourself, what do you need to do today to get the research you want for your paper?" In another classroom a teacher made similar comments to help students think about completing projects successfully, "On Monday I am giving back the published reports. Imagine how much better the report would have been if the picture had been completed. On Monday you will have a workday to work on things you need to do. Following a time schedule is very important, isn't it? Staying on task and realizing there is a deadline." All of the strategies modeled by teachers in situations like this were intended to help students be successful independent learners in school and beyond.

Principle 4: BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING

Finding 1: The creative use of available time, staff, parents, and peers benefits and supports ALL students.

There were many examples of the creative use of time, staff, parents and peers at Colby Middle School. Several of them have already been discussed in previous sections and include the Excel class, which is a study hall period conducted by a special educator for any students who need it, the Encore classes, which are special interest classes teachers in the school offer like aerobics and astronomy; and the SUMIT program, which is an advisor/advisee program that places small groups of students with an adult in the building to address personal, academic and social issues faced by adolescents. Also discussed previously were the ways in which school staff worked together to support students with and without disabilities. General and special educators were observed team teaching together to include students with special needs in the general education classroom and to support all students. The following section from a researcher's observation notes describes the benefits of the collaboration between special and general educators:

I was observing in a general education math class and the special education teacher was also in the room working with students. I asked her how many students in the room were hers and she said, "Six." She had helped a student sitting near me a couple of times and I asked if that was one of her students and she said, "No." She explained to me that two of her students that are in this class had been in pullout math until this year. She said one of the students is experiencing a great deal of success. She said this student is even volunteering answers in class.

The guidance counselor at Colby Middle School also works in unique ways to help students and staff. It is not unusual for a school guidance counselor to work with students who need help, but the counselor at Colby defined her job in broader terms. She said, "I tell people that I am here for students, for parents and for staff. In the three years I have been here, I have actually made several referrals for staff members for outside agencies. If I can be a referral source, then it helps the staff and it helps the kids." This was a sentiment expressed and demonstrated by school staff in so many ways at Colby Middle School as they worked together to support each other and the students.

While Colby staff work in many creative ways to support all students, the principal said that there is an additional program she would like to offer for students. She said that she has set aside funds to start an after-school program for students. Her vision for the after-school program was that it would focus on academic study rather than detention. An after-school program could provide additional supports for students who need help with academics and seems like an excellent alternative to after-school detention.

Finding 2: Peers serve as natural supports for their classmates.

There were many examples of students with disabilities and those without working together on class activities and projects. Teachers mentioned this as a technique they like to use to provide support for students with special needs and to make sure they are

included in all learning activities. As one teacher explained after an observation of his class, “I have a certification in special education, so I work with students with special needs and make modifications as needed. Like today’s lesson, I might have paired students up so that a student with special needs would have another student who could serve as a good model for writing.”

In another classroom observation a female student identified with ED was working with a male student in a general education science class. The two of them were working together to identify a particular rock sample. They both looked at it and then referred to a classification chart that had information to help them identify the rocks. They narrowed it down to a particular part of the chart and then decided what it was. The special education aide, who was in the room working with students said, “What did you decide it was?” The two students told her what they had concluded and the aide wrote it on the lab sheet. Although the aide was in the room to provide support for the student with ED, because the student was working so well with her general education partner, all the assistance the aide had to provide was to record data on the lab sheet.

As has been described in previous findings, students with special needs and general education students worked well together and seemed comfortable relying on one another for support. In one classroom observation, a student identified as ADHD consulted with a general education student sitting in the next row. She provided him with the information he needed about the next day’s assignment and he recorded it in his Agenda book. This kind of interaction would be much less likely to occur in schools where students with special needs spend part to all of their day in a pull-out program. A parent of a student with special needs expressed appreciation for the benefits of special and general education students working together when she said, “I know this year kids are not pulled out of the class, so they get everything [all curriculum]. They get to learn from kids who do know the answer.”

Finding 3: Whole Schools provide positive, proactive supports for behavior management.

The behavior management system employed at Colby revolved around the “Agenda” book all students are required to carry and use. The Agenda book includes rules for behavior that all students are expected to follow, and has a place for students to record required assignments for every day and every subject. If the student doesn’t complete an assignment, that assignment gets highlighted in the Agenda book by the classroom teacher. Each week the teachers have a one on one conference with each student and the students earn points for work completed. Each week the students can earn up to 25 points and when they earn a certain number of points they get a to go on a class trip. The one-on-one meetings occur during advisor/advisee (SUMIT) time and the other students in the room journal and participate in other activities while the conferences are going on. Teachers at Colby were observed monitoring Agenda books consistently, which helped to alert them immediately if a student was falling behind.

Other ways Colby staff provided positive, proactive supports for student behavior that have been addressed in previous sections were involving them in the development of

class guidelines for behavior and consequences, providing them with rubrics that delineate clear expectations for student work and participation, reducing the pupil to teacher ratio through staff collaboration, implementing motivating, authentic curriculum and varying instructional approaches to meet.

While many effective approaches to behavior management were observed, there were some concerns expressed by teachers, parents and students about lack of discipline in the school. One parent mentioned this when asked what could be improved at Colby Middle School. She said, “There hasn’t been anything that has disappointed me other than the lack of authority teachers seem to have. There are times that I have been here waiting for my son and I can’t believe some of the behavior, I don’t know how people put up with that.” A student echoed this sentiment when she said she saw incidents of harassment and students bringing cigarettes to school. The student said, “There is a lot of harassment that is going on here that needs to be recognized. There is a state law that all of the schools have to have a Code of Conduct. My understanding is that if kids are causing problems, it [the Code of Conduct] is to get them out of the classroom. I don’t see that happening here.”

Some of the Colby teachers linked the discipline problems in the school to the approach to discipline taken by the principal. One teacher said, “She [the principal] disciplines when she has to but she would prefer not to. She is not a big detention giver. She does if she has to, but she doesn’t like to. She has told me that she doesn’t think that detention curbs behavior.” Another teacher said of the principal’s discipline, “She has done well with playing games and that is good, but when it comes to discipline, it hasn’t been good. The kids seem less afraid to do things.” A concern about discipline was also expressed in student interviews. One student had this to say: “As far as discipline, I think she [the principal] could do better. Kids get a detention and they have to clean. Well, some kids don’t really care if they get 15 minutes of cleaning so that really doesn’t do any good.” Due to the discipline concerns expressed by teachers, parents and students this may be an area that the Colby Middle School Community wants to examine further.

Principle 5: PARTNERING

Finding 1: Joining together with families, community members and university faculty mutually benefits all.

There were several ways that Colby Middle School faculty and students worked with families and community members to benefit all. One example is the “Make a Difference” activities sponsored by the student council. On a designated “Make a Difference Day” a special subcommittee of students buy doughnuts for the whole school staff, make coffee and then when the buses come in the morning to deliver students, the Make a Difference group gives the bus drivers doughnuts, coffee and sweep the buses out. The student council advisor had this to say about the reaction to the “Make a Difference” day, “Yes, this is the third year we are doing it and the bus drivers say, ‘Keep doing it.’” The student council advisor said they were also trying to organize something for the students to rake leaves in the community, but it was difficult to find time when the students were free due to their involvement in sports and other after-school activities.

Another way students in the school reach out to the community is the “electricity fair” the sixth grade science students sponsor for elementary school students. The middle school students create electricity projects, which were described in detail in a previous section. The projects include haunted houses with ghosts that light up, boats that have propellers powered by electricity and working merry-go-rounds. The science teacher that assigns the electricity project explained that the middle school students set their electricity projects up in the gym and the elementary students cycle through and see how all of the projects work. In this way, the middle school students get an opportunity to act as teachers and share what they learned about electricity and the elementary students get a nice introduction to sophisticated science concepts. The middle school students presenting at the “electricity fair” included students with and without disabilities.

The school guidance counselor found ways to reach out to parents in the community. She said she telephones, sends notes home, communicates through student Agenda books and makes home visits. She said there are also occasions when she holds a “whole parent meeting” to address important issues. In addition, she said, “I’ve got a lot of parent resources. I’ve got books and cassettes that I will recommend to parents.” While Colby staff and students are reaching out to families and the community in important ways, this is an area that teachers expressed an interest in exploring further. Since linking with the larger community can mutually benefit the school and the community, Colby Middle School is encouraged to continue to develop these connections.

Finding 2: Collaboration and Co-Teaching strengthens the overall school community and learning experiences.

As has been highlighted over and over again in descriptions of Colby Middle School, collaboration and co-teaching are real areas of strength for school staff. Grade level teams work closely together to develop curriculum, and support students. Each grade level team was observed doing a major integrated unit involving several discipline areas. One of the eighth grade teachers shared that her grade level team does four integrated units per year. The one that was observed during the research study was focused on Native Americans. In science, students created a scale model of a canoe and then a life-sized one out of cardboard and duct tape. In language arts the students explored the languages of Native Americans, learned sign language, and looked at cave drawings. In math students studied cultures and created models of Native American homes. Finally, in social studies students learned about political history and treaties. By working together to plan and integrate curriculum, Colby teachers were providing powerful and authentic learning experiences for their students.

As has also been discussed previously, special and general educators at Colby also work closely together to support all students. Each grade level team has a special education teacher assigned to the team who supports students with and without disabilities at that grade level. The school guidance counselor even occasionally team-taught with a special education teacher. The pairing had an added bonus as the guidance counselor shared, “I team teach the teen issues class with [a male special education teacher]. This lends strength to the class. It gives the male and female perspective.”

One final note about collegial relationships at Colby Middle School. Teachers in the school seemed to truly enjoy working together and there was a great deal of camaraderie observed in classrooms, in the hallways and in the teachers' workroom. One of the teachers explained that Colby has a district wellness committee that planned activities like cross country skiing and pumpkin carving. This teacher also said that on in-service days the grade level teams take turns planning a special lunch that all teachers eat together. The teacher concluded, "We have a fun staff and a close staff and that makes it really enjoyable to work here."

Finding 3: Parents and students feel supported by school staff.

Colby Middle School staff found many ways to reach out to parents and students. Teachers talked about sending monthly newsletters, weekly progress reports and Good News postcards to parents. The Good News postcards were sent out to chosen students' parents each week to inform them of their child's success in school. In addition, the teachers relied on phone calls, email and the Agenda books to communicate with parents. As one teacher stated, "We have phones in our rooms, we all have email, [and] we have voice mail. Parents can't really complain that they can't get a hold of us."

Teachers also shared how the STEP program for behavior problems includes a parent component. As students have behavior problems, they move through a series of steps. The third step is a call home to the parents. A parent/student/teacher meeting is set up, which the student plans and conducts. At the meeting the student shares his/her plan for addressing the behavior. This approach encourages students to take responsibility for their behavior and brings parents in on the process.

Extra efforts are made by Colby staff to reach out to the parents of students with disabilities. A special educator explained that at the beginning of every school year, the district sponsors a picnic for all special education students and their parents. The special educator said that the picnic provides an opportunity for students and their parents to get to know special education staff in the school. During the school year, teachers maintain communication with the parents of special education students through all of the channels already mentioned, plus a special education progress report is sent out every four weeks.

To further provide support for parents, Colby Middle School has a parent/school coordinator that handles situations when parents aren't comfortable contacting school staff directly. The parent/school coordinator also develops programs for parents, sends information packets home and works with individual students and parents. Parent interviews indicated that parents notice and appreciate the efforts made by school staff to keep them informed of their children's progress. One parent said, "My son was at a parochial school and he came here because he needed some special education classes. He has the extra help he needed. The teachers have been so willing to work with him; they understand his needs. The communication is really open."

There were many ways that school staff reach out to students, one that has already been mentioned is the SUMIT advisor/advisee program that matches small groups of students to a caring adult in the building. In addition to supporting students, the advisor for each

child also can serve as a contact person for parents. A unique way one of the special education teachers said she was going to reach out to students was through making a web page. Her plan was to give her students a way to find out class assignments. The teacher said that they had discovered that 60% of the students have access to the Internet.

Students also described feeling supported by Colby teachers. One student said, “I think a lot of the teachers are really good about saying if you need help just ask for it and they are really good about providing help and letting kids do it on their own if they want to.” Another student expressed a similar sentiment with even more enthusiasm, “If we have a question in anything, we can go up to them [teachers] and ask a question and we don’t have to be embarrassed. And they don’t say, ‘I already taught you that and you should know it.’ They just give us a reference to go back to. I love coming to school, it’s fun coming to school.”

While most feedback from parents was very positive, one parent expressed frustration with the support her child was getting. Her child was not identified as having a disability and yet the parent felt that the child had some needs that weren’t being addressed. The parent said, “The system is not built to work with middle of the road kids. It is frustrating as a parent when your child isn’t getting the help they need.” This same parent said that her child was not able to earn enough points to go on the class field trips students earned for good behavior and academic performance. She said, “I see kids with significant needs and the gifted kids going on field trips and getting acknowledgment all of the time. Our child has not gone on one class trip or field trip because they can’t earn the points to go.”

Conclusions

When reviewing all of the research data, there were some additional items that emerged and warrant further discussion and investigation. One is the request for more in-service for teachers. During teacher interviews, a desire was expressed to see more in-service related to collaboration and teamwork. Since collaboration is such an essential component of Colby’s effectiveness, further in-service may be worth considering. There was also a request for more in-service on technology and its application in the classroom.

Another issue that was raised during teacher interviews was examining a Resource Room Model for inclusion. With a Resource Room Model, students are included in the general education classroom and participate in the general education curriculum. The resource room is available for students who need extra help. The teacher who raised the issue said that a lot of the schools in the area are going to the Resource Room Model. While this is an issue that my warrant further discussion, Colby Middle School staff are encouraged to preserve all of the inclusionary practices that are currently so effective in the school.

A third issue that was raised was related to doing more with parents. The principal said there is Title VI. Money available and she would like to use it for developing programs that would be appropriate for parents of middle schoolers. A possibility she suggested was bringing in speakers who might talk about how to identify depression in kids or how

parents can keep up with their kids in technology. She also thought the school could sponsor a book club and identify books parents might want to read.

Thank you to Mrs. Sheridan and all of the teachers, parents and students at Colby Middle School for their cooperation and support for this project. A special thank you to Anna Kaiser who took responsibility for arranging classroom visits and setting up teacher, parent and student interviews.