

**SCHOOL PROFILE**  
**Verona Area High School**  
**300 Richard St.**  
**Verona, WI 53593**



**Type of School:** \*Senior High School (Grades 9 – 12)

**Location:** \*Verona: Located 5 miles southwest of Madison, WI

**Size:** \*Suburban: Population 7000  
\*Approximately 1200 students  
\*Student-teacher ratios are typically 10-1

**Student Population:** \*90% Caucasian, 10% African-American, less than 1% other  
\* Students with a range of disabilities are included

**Principal:** \*Kelly Meyers – Principal for 8 years  
\*Served Verona Area Senior High School for 13 years

**Teachers:** \*120 total teachers  
\*Mix of new and experienced teachers due to rapid growth

**Summary of Classrooms, Teachers, and Students Involved in the Research Study  
Verona High School- Verona, Wisconsin**

**Spring, 1999**

**Grade:** High School  
**Teacher:** Ms. Holly Dionne—Writing Centers and History  
Ms. Fritz a support person in EEN  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 8 students total; 2 female, 6 males  
2<sup>nd</sup> class period combined with another class English/History

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Hammerly—Consumer Education (team taught)  
Ms. Walsh (Math)  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;  
**Class Make-up:** 20 students total; 6 boys and 14 girls

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Hammerly—Foods,  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;  
**Class Make-up:** 5 students total; 4 girls and 1 boy; 5 students missing

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Kevin Hoffman—Horticulture  
Ms. Jo Anderson, Special Ed.  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;  
**Class Make-up:** 15 students total; 10 boys, 5 girls

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Dow—Integrated science and math  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation—fieldtrip  
**Class Make-up:** 40 students total; three staff

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Marge Voelz—biology  
**Target students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 19 students total

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Jim Guy—Integrated geometry  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 40 students total;

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Richard Dow—Integrated biology and math  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Teresa Voss—Social Studies  
**Target students:** Whole class observation; 1 EEN student

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mrs. Hammerly—Foods 3  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 7 students total; only 3 in class today-4 out of 7 are Special Ed.

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Walsh—Geometry  
**Target students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 19 students total; 11 females, 8 males

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Walsh and Ms. Hammerly— Cons. Ed. 1 & 2  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 19 students total; 6 boys, 13 females, 2 are African Americans

**Grade:** High School  
**Teacher:** Ms. Hammerly—Continue Living, juniors and seniors  
**Target Students:** Whole Class Observation  
**Class Make-up:** 9 students total

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Hoffman and Ms. Jo Anderson—agriculture  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 13 students total; 3 females, 10 males—2 African American

**Grade:** High School  
**Teacher:** Ms. Voss—English 10 and World History  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 19 students total; 11 females, 8 males

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Dionne—English, sophomores  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

### **Fall, 1999 – Spring 2000**

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Becker—Ceramics class 1  
Ms. Anderson special education  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; 4 special ed. students  
**Class Make-up:** 17-18 students total

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Becker—Ceramics class 2  
 EEN aide (Mrs. R)  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Hoffman—Horticulture 2  
 Ms. Anderson special education  
**Target students:** Whole class observation; 5 EEN students  
**Class Make-up:** 9 students total; 8 boys and 1 girl, 2 are missing

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Kuehl—Algebra 1  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation  
**Class Make-up:** 16 students total; 8 girls and 8 boys

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voss/Ms. Thomas—World History/English, sophomore level  
 Ms. Anderson  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voss—Social Studies  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; Anthony  
**Class Make-up:** 24 students total; 3 groups

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Hoffman—Horticulture;  
 Ms. Jo Anderson – special educator  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; Anthony

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voss—Social Studies  
 Ms. Jo Anderson – special educator  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; Anthony

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Dow/Ms. Golden—9<sup>th</sup> grade science  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;  
**Class Make-up:** 14 students total; 10 boys—2 black, 4 girls—2 black

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Hammerly’s—Advanced Food Science (substitute teacher)  
 Ms. Bandt, ENN teacher  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; Cindy  
**Class Make-up:** 8 students total; 6 girls—1 black, 2 boys—1 black

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voelz—Biology  
Ms. Bergsbaken, Spec. Ed. EEN  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voss—Social Studies/History  
Gina Panighetti, student teacher  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation;

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Mr. Dow—Int. Science  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Foods 2—substitute teacher  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation; Cindy, Angel, Renee  
**Class Make-up:** 9 students total; 6 girls, 3 boys—1 African American

**Grade:** High School  
**Teachers:** Ms. Voss—Social Studies  
Ms. Thomas—English  
Ms. Gina Panighetti, student teacher teaches today  
Ms. Jo Anderson, Spec. Ed.  
**Target Students:** Whole class observation

**Researchers who observed and recorded data:**

<b>Paula DeHart</b>	<b>Spring, 1999; Spring 2000</b>
<b>Kim Beloin</b>	<b>Spring 1999</b>
<b>JoAnne Suomi</b>	<b>Spring, 1999</b>
<b>Nancy Proctor</b>	<b>Fall, 1999 – Fall, 2000</b>

**People Interviewed**

<b>3-14-00</b>	<b>Kelly Meyers</b>	<b>School Principal</b>	<b>Interview by: DeHart</b>
<b>3- 14-00</b>	<b>JoEllen Anderson</b>	<b>Special Educator</b>	<b>Interview by: DeHart</b>
<b>3- 14-00</b>	<b>Holly Dionne</b>	<b>English Teacher</b>	<b>Interview by: DeHart</b>
<b>3-14-00</b>	<b>Theresa Voss</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Interview by: DeHart</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Theresa Voss</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Sue Poast</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>

<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Arlys Nilles</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Nate Seay</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Dusty Poast</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Scott Nilles</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Sara McCarthy</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>
<b>11-16-00</b>	<b>Whitney Bembenick</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Interview by: Proctor</b>

**Curriculum:**

Integrated English and History classes

Science classes have strong lab component

School has greenhouse where horticulture classes work

### **EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY:**

- Students and parents are involved in the Site Council, which sets policies and makes decisions for the High School.
- Student organizations such as “People Striving to Improve” provide leadership, community service and educational choices.
- The Verona School District has two charter schools, which provide parents and students with educational choices.

### **INCLUDE ALL:**

- Students with disabilities have participated in general education courses for the majority, if not all of their day since 1985.
- A special education resource room is available and used for some students with cognitive disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are actively involved in sports, clubs, school and community activities

### **TEACH & ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY:**

- Special educators team teach with content area educators
- Students have authentic learning experiences within the school and out in the community
- A math resource and writing center are available for anyone requesting assistance

### **BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING:**

- An after school study program staffed by teachers is available to anyone seeking additional assistance.
- Community ties are built and strengthened through mentorship and work co-op programs.
- Positive behavior plans are developed for students with challenging behaviors in order to provide consistent and positive strategies for students.  
Peer mentors work with students in academic and social settings
- A daycare center at Verona Area Senior High is provided for high school students with children. It has been in operation for 4 years. All staff assist students learning parenting skills.

### **PARTNERING:**

- A parent committee meets monthly to share and discuss questions and concerns.
- Community business members work with school staff to present a career fair.

## **Introduction**

Verona High School is a suburban school just outside of Madison, Wisconsin with a somewhat diverse population of students with and without disabilities. Verona High 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, Verona High 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.**

Within the broad arena of democratic schooling, two areas of support for decision-making surfaced as key to the overall sense of empowerment on the part of Verona High School community members. The first of these is the kind and extent of support for decision-making shown by the Kelly Meyer, the building principal and the second is the presence and degree of site-based management in the school and school district.

It was clear from teacher interviews that Kelly Meyers is a highly respected administrator who supports democratic decision making in Verona High School. Teachers described Kelly as professional, hard working, caring and supportive. As one teacher said, “Kelly has tremendous rapport in the community. It is an honor to work with our administration. They are caring; they look to the future for the benefit of kids. They look at how they can promote growth over time, for the kids first and then for the faculty.” Teachers said they felt strong support for their decisions from Kelly, so strong that teachers felt confident that they would be supported even if Kelly didn’t agree with them. A teacher expressed this when she said, “All three of our principals, you can go to them and ask for suggestions and support, and they will support you. Even if I don’t do the right thing, I know they will support me as much as they can. I don’t think you could have a better administration.” Having this kind of support from their principal resulted in Verona teachers feeling they were trusted, respected and perceived as professionals.

Verona teachers felt empowered to make many decisions about their curricular programs and classroom instruction. Observations demonstrated that the teachers worked together in creative ways that were quite unique for a high school setting. Teachers across subject areas worked together, like English and history faculty team teaching classes together. General and special educators were also frequently observed engaging in collaborative teaching. Teachers said they felt very supported by administration in experimenting with these kinds of collaborations. One of the English teachers explained, “We have a lot of autonomy as an English department. We can apply for Project Team monies and other



paid curriculum time, that usually happens in the summer. We can shape projects that are global in nature like addressing the state standards or working on differentiating texts. Kelly will bequeath funds and then say who is going to be in on this, how will you monitor your time what will you have to show for it.” This same teacher went on to say this about Kelly Meyers, “At times I wished that we had less autonomy and that she would move on decisions. But she is so vested in the site council model. She looks for input when you can’t even see why she needs the input.” This last comment is indicative of the kind of power Verona teachers had over decisions that were made in the school. It is rare to visit a school where teachers feel their input is requested too much by school administration.

Another way Verona High School teachers are involved in democratic decision-making is through the site-based council. A teacher explains how site-based management at Verona is structured: “We have site-based management. All schools in the district have complete financial and educational control. We have a site council that is composed of students, teachers and administrators. There are 24 of these individuals and we make all of the decisions.” Again, the degree of power held by Verona’s site-based council was quite striking in that they controlled over 85% of the school funds and also had a voice in hiring decisions for the district. Having power over financial matters in a school communicates a high degree of trust in the ability of school staff to make good decisions for the school and the students they serve. Demonstrating this kind of trust in her staff, Kelly Meyers said, “Overall, it is really worth it. I’m not even a voting member of the site council. I do have veto power, like if our site council decided to get rid of the music department I couldn’t let them do that. I have never in 8 years vetoed anything. I don’t always like everything they decide, but I have never vetoed anything.”

## **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. Verona High School students were involved in leadership roles and decision-making in several ways. First, as was mentioned under the previous finding, students served on the site-based council. Since Verona’s site-based council had the power to make important decisions about school policy, programs and funding decisions, students had a voice in these decisions as well. Verona was the only school in the Whole Schooling Research study that had students taking part on the site-based council. While that is probably due in part to the age of the students, inviting them to serve on the council still communicates a high degree of trust in students and encourages them to take on important leadership roles in the school and school district.

Verona High School students were also involved in student government. While student government activities were not observed as a part of this research study, it was noted by observers that time was taken out of the school day to hold school elections, suggesting that student government was considered an integral part of the workings of the school rather than as an add-on or extra-curricular activity.

Additional ways that Verona High School students were involved in decision-making were related to choosing what courses to take from a wide variety of course offerings and occasionally making the decision to drop courses if the courses created a load that was too heavy or a student was experiencing great difficulty in a course. The parent of a student with special needs said her son was supported by the school when he decided to drop a course that was not working out for him. She said that even though he dropped the class very late, “the school just made it a W, not a withdraw with an F.” The parent explained that her son had discussed his decision at great length with one of his special education teachers, so she was happy that even though the school supported her son’s decision, he also learned that “he can’t just quit when it gets hard.”

Verona High School students were also observed making choices within the classrooms. Verona teachers worked hard to create an interesting and engaging curriculum and frequently had a variety of projects from which to choose. One of the history teachers explained that she liked to have a variety of project options that highlight different learning styles so that if students are strong in writing, they can demonstrate what they have learned through writing and if they are more artistic they can choose an artistic way to complete the project. This offering of choices is especially beneficial for students with special needs who may struggle with one mode of learning or communicating like writing.

One last area where Verona High School students were observed making decisions and taking on leadership roles was observed in a reading and writing skills class. In this class, students took turns being the teacher. When it was their turn to be the teacher, each student chose articles for the whole class to read, developed discussion questions for the class discussion and created an assessment to evaluate their classmates understanding of the article. Not only were their peers assessed with the evaluation instrument, but the teachers in the class were also required to participate and complete the assessment. During an observation of one of the reading and writing skills classes, a student chose an Ellie Weisel article for everyone to read and created a special essay test for the teachers (in this case an English teacher and a special educator) to complete. As the teachers worked on the test, they asked questions like, “Can we use our notes and the article?” and “If I don’t finish now, will you stay after school with me until 6:00 until I finish?” The teachers’ comments were made in good humor, but what the larger experience provided for Verona students was the opportunity to take on the leadership role of a teacher and learn about everything that entails as far as planning, preparation and people skills.

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

The greatest area of change with which Verona High School has had to contend is the increase in student population. Verona is located just outside of Madison, Wisconsin, and the entire area is experiencing rapid growth. Just in the last six years, the district student population has increased by 20%. With the rapid growth the school district has also seen changing demographics. In some schools in the district, free and reduced lunch increased from 8% of the students to 44% of the students in just six years. In that same six years, the number of students with special education needs has increased by 54%. This kind of growth presents many challenges to a school district as was reflected in Verona High

School. One of these was the impact on the experience level of teachers. In an interview with Kelly Meyers, the principal, she shared that in the previous year she had hired 17 new people. She said, “I have 60 people in the staff room for a meeting. It’s ridiculous. Our students need some experienced teachers to work with them and I try to do that when I hire. That isn’t always easy to do.” While the rapid growth in student population and the resulting increase in new teaching staff created challenges for Verona High School administrators and teachers, it seemed to have little effect on school reform efforts occurring in the school. Verona High School demonstrated a strong commitment to the ideals of including all students, promoting democratic principles, implementing authentic curriculum, and partnering with parents and the community and were not deterred by the changes brought about by rapid growth and changing demographics.

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

There were several ways in which Verona High School administration promoted staff development, research and collaboration. The first of these was the ways in which Kelly Meyers modeled and encouraged professionalism. Several teachers spoke of the importance of Ms. Meyers as a professional role model. In describing this critical role one teacher stated, “The principal puts articles in my mailbox. Every other week she puts out a newsletter that describes teaching strategies and other things that work in schools.” Because Kelly Meyers shared professional literature and promoted professional dialogue, Verona teachers seemed especially enthusiastic about trying new ideas, were able to identify the theoretical approach they were implementing, and could explain how the teaching strategies they were utilizing benefited their students.

Another way Verona High School administration promoted staff development, research and collaboration was through their support of professional growth opportunities for their teachers. The professional growth opportunities took the form of workshops, in-service training, teacher-release time, and time and funding for curriculum development and collaboration. Some specific examples given were special training for new people coming into the district. As mentioned in a previous finding because of the growth in student population, Verona High School was also adding new faculty at a rapid pace. The new teachers often needed special training to be successful in the classroom and the administration worked hard to provide that training. One teacher explains the importance the administration places on new people getting the necessary training, “If new people come in and need training, they will provide that training. It may cost money and they may have to scramble to find it, but they find the money.” Another teacher shared that when she started a new position as learning resource coordinator she had no direct training, but she said, “Kelly is very good about bringing in consultants if I need that to help me do my job better.”

Teachers serving as experts and consultants to their colleagues was a professional development practice that was also strongly supported by Verona High School administration. The principal shared that she encouraged staff with expertise in a particular area to provide in-service training for colleagues. Specifically, she mentioned

that she has had ESL staff, EEN staff and school psychologists give presentations to suggest effective strategies to other school faculty members for including students with special needs in their classrooms. As will be discussed in later findings, there was a lot of evidence to show that many general education teachers were successfully doing modifications in their classrooms for students who needed them, due in part to the collaboration and in-servicing supported by the administration.

One final way Verona High School administration supported teachers in professional development, collaboration and research was by encouraging them to present at professional meetings. The learning resource coordinator in the school shared that the principal had invited her, the school's technology coordinator and a technologically savvy teacher to make a presentation to the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators on using technology in the classroom. The district also supported a Verona High School special educator and history teacher in presenting Whole Schooling practices implemented in their school at the annual meeting of The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps. Opportunities for professional growth were highly valued by the Verona teachers interviewed and the principal's support for professional growth was appreciated as this teacher's statement makes clear, "She (Kelly. Meyers) loves to give us opportunities to attend conferences, to collaborate and team together, even during the [school] day. During the summer, we can get curriculum hours, where we get paid." While cost to the district can deter some school leaders from investing in staff development, Verona High School demonstrates the many benefits that are gained from making this investment. The support Verona teachers felt from administration for professional growth, collaboration and research came out in increased job satisfaction, commitment to district goals and a strong focus on meeting the needs of all students.

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

The Verona High School student population is somewhat racially diverse, with 10% of the students being non-Caucasian. The racial diversity of the school reflects the diversity of the larger Verona community. While there wasn't a great deal of racial diversity in the school, students from diverse backgrounds seemed to be accepted and valued within the school community. Classes were racially mixed, and within the classes, students worked together in racially mixed groups. Racial diversity is an issue that Verona High School will want to continue to monitor as the school becomes more racially diverse. In this area, the principal expressed an interest in bringing more of a focus to multiculturalism in the school curriculum. This is an area Verona High School is encouraged to pursue to ensure that the open, accepting attitude toward racial diversity continues in the school

Another form of diversity that was clearly valued in Verona High School was support for inclusion of students with varying disabilities and special needs. The administrators, teachers and students all expressed an appreciation for including students with special needs in the school community. When asked, students said they didn't really notice which students in their classes had special needs and that these students were not singled out. There were several comments that highlighted just how much the school community did

embrace students with special needs. A special education teacher described a problem that arose because of the high degree of tolerance on the part of the student population:

The [school] environment is very tolerant of students with special needs. Sometimes too tolerant. We had a student who was CD who liked to hug everyone. He was 6'2", it was a little intimidating. We had to teach students to say, "I'll high five you, but I won't hug you. When he gets out into the real world, he isn't going to be able to hug everyone.

In another interview, a student noted the same level of acceptance. She said, "People in the school actually are so nice to them [students with disabilities] that it's almost reverse segregation they are so nice to them." The strong support for inclusion in Verona High School appeared to begin with administration, was advanced and supported by teachers and then filtered down and influenced the level of acceptance on the part of students for their disabled peers.

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

As the previous findings have highlighted, Verona teachers are empowered to make decisions about the curriculum and instruction they deliver in their classrooms and have a voice in larger school and school district issues through the site-based council. In addition, teachers are encouraged to develop their true selves through the innovative collaborations in which they participate with other teachers in the school. Teachers were observed working together in cross-curricular collaborations like history and English, math and science, science and agriculture and math and consumer education. Special and general educators were also seen collaborating and co-teaching in general education classrooms. Some benefits to these collaborations for teachers developing their true selves relate to the creativity the teachers brought to their lessons and assignments because of the joining of subject areas. An example of this is an integrated assignment described by a history teacher who teamed with an English teacher. The focus of the unit they were team teaching was the French Revolution. For one of the integrated assignments, students could choose to write a letter from a French prison describing the conditions and what was happening or they could describe being on trial during the Revolution and their treatment during the trial. The history teacher explained that the assignments were graded in both history and English. For the history part students were graded for their main points and the evidence they used to support them and in English they were graded for the mechanics of writing, sentence structure and word usage. By merging the two subject areas, the teachers were able to develop meaningful assignments that would have been difficult to carry out in their individual classrooms.

In another example of co-teaching, both the teachers and the students were empowered to develop their true selves. This teaching team involved the history teacher from the previous example and another history teacher. The content focus of the class was European history, with one teacher emphasizing Eastern European information and the other focusing more on Western European art, music and cooking. The teacher doing the

art music and cooking described herself as “more artsy-fartsy” so she was able to bring some of her special interests and talents to the class. The benefits to the students, as described by the teacher were that “throughout the unit, kids will be exposed to just about everything that they can be exposed to.” She went on to say, “I actually had a student who played Beethoven for us, and I didn’t even know he played the piano. So here is someone who flourished because he knew exactly what he wanted to do.”

Students were also empowered to develop their true selves through the variety of courses, organizations, and extra-curricular activities they were able to participate in. The school offered a wide array of athletic and sports opportunities; clubs; music, art and drama classes and activities; and social events like Homecoming, Prom, Winter Wonderland and other school gatherings and dances. In student interviews, when asked what was good about their school, students often referred to specific classes, activities or facilities that the school provided that helped them to pursue their interests and develop their talents. One student said he really enjoyed the welding class he was able to take because “I really like working with my hands, like building stuff.” Another student described some school offerings that he particularly liked: “I like wrestling. I like the facilities, the weight room. They have a good agriculture program. I’m taking animal vet science. Right now I am just exploring and trying to find out what I might do.” As this student suggests, high school is a time of great growth and exploration for students and through their many offerings, Verona High School provides opportunities for students to explore options, develop skills and discover hidden talents.

## **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 Verona High 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.**

There was overwhelming evidence in Verona High School that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. The focus on inclusion started with the support of administration. As Kelly Meyers, the principal, explained,

One of the largest comments would be that we are driven by a highly inclusive philosophy. Our primary goal is to provide as many students as possible with equal opportunities. So if you look at schedules of students who used to be excluded, you will see we are actually practicing inclusion, we aren’t just saying we are including kids. Do we have 100% inclusion? No, but we are really trying to provide all experiences to all kids.

The goal of full inclusion was also echoed by one of the special educators in the school. She explained that in the current year she didn’t have any self-contained classes while in

the past she had done some self-contained math and social studies. One way the school was able to move away from self-contained special education classes was to enroll students who might have previously been in a self-contained math class into a consumer math class. This way, students were able to get the math credits they needed to graduate and also participate in a curriculum in which they could succeed. The special educator commented, "We think being with peers is the preferred way to be. When they get out of high school, they are not going to be in sheltered environments."

Classroom observations also demonstrated that Verona students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. Observations were conducted in math, science, English, history, art, consumer education and horticulture classes and students with varying cognitive, emotional and physical disabilities were observed participating in these classes. The observations also showed that students with disabilities had many supports to help them succeed in the general education classes. Special education teachers and aides were present in any classroom where three or more students with disabilities were present. In addition, students with more severe disabilities had one-on-one support from special education staff when needed. In one science classroom observation, a student with significant cognitive and physical disabilities and was confined to a wheelchair, was participating in a classroom activity dealing with relocating populations of deer. A special education aide worked one-on-one with the student as he gave verbal answers to the questions on the deer population activity sheet and the aide recorded the answers.

Classroom teachers structured their classroom curriculum and assignments in ways that also helped include students with special needs. Some of the techniques used were differentiating curriculum by ability like offering books at varying levels of difficulty on the same topic; teaching to varying learning styles and intelligences like using literature, art, drama, music and video all focused on a theme; and engaging students in experiential and hands-on lessons and labs. An example of how this last technique was used successfully was in a ceramics class. Students were continually involved in learning new techniques and creating ceramics projects using their hands and a potter's wheel to mold clay. Observations showed students with and without special needs being highly engrossed in their projects, and disruptions or discipline problems were rarely seen. The art teacher explained an approach he liked to take to help all students succeed. He said he introduces a new ceramics technique to the whole class, but then does not require everyone to proceed at the same time. In this way, he said, an advanced student can make multiple pieces while a less advanced student can proceed at his/her own pace. He concluded by saying he really likes having the mix of advanced and less advanced students in each class. It is interesting to note that this art teacher planned his classes with the expectation that he would have students of varying ability level, embraced this fact and planned accordingly. This was an attitude that was commonly expressed by Verona High School teachers and helped students with disabilities to be successfully included in the general education classroom.

## **Finding 2: Inclusion is valuable for children with disabilities.**

Students with a wide range of special needs were observed participating and succeeding in general education courses throughout Verona High School. The classes observed included those with an academic focus like history, biology, algebra, geometry, English, and general science; those with an arts focus like ceramics; and those with a more vocational/technical focus like foods, consumer education and agriculture. Students with special needs in these classes participated in the same instructional activities as general education students, sometimes with modifications, other times modifications were not necessary. In a parent interview, the mother of a student with special needs explained that her son had participated fully in the general education curriculum and that teachers made modifications when needed. She said of her son, “He is still required to take all of the English and writing classes and that’s where all the modifications are. Like if there are four books [required] for the year, he’ll do two books for the year. I asked on the tests, if he got below 75%, he could correct what was wrong so he could learn what he did wrong.” She concluded her discussion of how her son had been included in Verona High School by saying, “The whole process made a big difference in his life. I always wonder where he would have ended up.”

Teachers also commented on how they were able to structure their classes to include students with special needs in the general education curriculum and build in extra supports where needed. Within the history and English team situation that was described in a previous finding, the history teacher said that because there were two teachers in the classroom, they could set up groups in a way to provide extra support for students who needed it. For example, she said they were able set up three groups in the English class and the English teacher provided one group with special instruction on paraphrasing, which she said was a skill that several EEN students in the group needed. While the group that needed help with paraphrasing was receiving special assistance, the other students in the class were working on similar projects, but without the paraphrasing exercises. Other ways students with special needs received extra help in this class was by having material read to them while they highlighted the text and by getting a range of choices for projects so they could work to their strengths.

Interviews with students with special needs indicated that they were aware of the ways teachers in their classes were helping them succeed. One student said of his English teacher, “She is doing well. She tells us at the beginning of the class and then we do it. We do a recap or a summary of the section that we read [from *Catcher in the Rye*]. And then you take the test, so it kind of makes it so you remember what was going on. Cuz usually right before a test you are kind of panicking and this just makes you calm down.” Another student with special needs talked about a special study hall he attended where he received extra help with his work. He also revealed an awareness of modifications teachers in his classrooms were making when he said, “Some of the teachers change things so everybody can learn.”

One final benefit of inclusion for students with disabilities was being integrated with the larger general education population rather than being segregated into self-contained special education classes. This encouraged widespread acceptance of students with



disabilities by the non-disabled student population as noted in a previous finding. A special educator also discussed another reason inclusion in the general education population is beneficial for students with disabilities when she said, “Our goal is to mainstream students, we hate to have self-contained [special education] classes. When you isolate this group of kids, the kids feed off of one another. That brings the whole learning experience down.” Verona High School community members are encouraged to continue their commitment to inclusion and to explore new ways to support students with special needs in general education classrooms and encourage their participation in the larger school community

### **Finding 3: Inclusion improves the educational experience for all children.**

There were several programs and instructional approaches implemented in Verona High School that were beneficial for students with special needs, but also improved the educational experience for all students in the classroom. The first of these was called “Resource,” which was a structured study hall students, could receive a quarter credit for attending. “Resource” was different from a traditional study hall in that the time was structured for learning. As one teacher stated, “Kids can’t choose to sleep through it.” This same teacher explained that although “Resource” wasn’t taught like a class, teachers who ran the study hall taught strategies for individuals and small groups as they were needed. Students could take up to two periods of “Resource” (still only received a quarter credit) if they had a health problem or learning needs that warranted two periods. While this structured study hall was especially beneficial for students with special needs, any student who needed extra help for whatever reason could attend “Resource.”

Another special program available to students with and without disabilities was a reading skills class that was available for any student who wanted to improve their reading strategies. Students were able to receive English credit for attending the reading skills class and the content covered was coordinated with curriculum from other academic classes so the reading students completed helped to reinforce their learning from other classes. The reading skills class was described in a previous section where a student was serving as teacher, choosing articles for the class to read, leading a discussion on the article and then creating an assessment for peers and teachers to complete based on the articles. So, not only were students with and without disabilities receiving extra help for reading, they were also getting opportunities to serve as leaders in the classroom as they taught reading skills to their peers. An added bonus to offering the reading skills classes is that teachers who were involved in the program and had students involved in the program learned new strategies for helping students succeed as readers that they were using with all students. In this way, even students not involved in the reading skills classes, whether they had disabilities or not, were benefiting from the program.

Another support that was originally instituted for students with special needs and then utilized for any student who needed it was moving from the general education classroom to a quiet area elsewhere to take a test. Sometimes the students just needed a quiet place free from distractions to take a test, other times support staff read the test for students who struggled with reading. As one teacher said, “It isn’t just EEN; I even have some high

level students who need help with the reading. They will also be pulled out to a quiet place where they can get help.” The Verona High School special education staff were credited for being very flexible about providing extra help to non-classified students that have been referred by general education teachers. One teacher expressed appreciation for the support provided by special educators when she said, “Sometimes we overload them with kids and they have been so good about saying yes.”

The open communication and collaboration between general and special educators shown in some of the programs described above spilled over into other areas. As one general educator stated, “I think we are more open than ever to listen to our special education faculty and the suggestions they have for modifications. A modification that is suggested for a student with learning disabilities turns out to be a good modification for all students, so why not just do it with all students.” Some additional strategies general educators picked up from their special education colleagues was supplementing a book that was being read in the class by showing a movie made of the book, using graphic organizers to help all students categorize and understand information, and communicating to students ahead of time what is going to be on a test or quiz to reduce anxiety and increase success.

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

There are many positive, proactive supports Verona High School provided for students with special needs that have already been mentioned in previous findings. One that needs further mention is the way grouping was used to encourage support and dialogue between students with and without disabilities. Since Verona teachers worked to distribute students with disabilities naturally throughout their classrooms, student work groups usually included general and special education students. In an interview with a general education student, she described the benefits of this kind of grouping practice when she said, “[The teacher] would put a group together with every certain kind of person; one or two special education kids; one or two really advanced kids. She thinks that helps all of us. If you are mediocre, it makes you feel really good that you can help. Even the advanced kids learn by having to explain.” A parent of a student with special needs also expressed support for grouping practices that support students like her son, “He works well in groups when the teams are divided up appropriately so the work can be split up to Stan’s strengths, not his weaknesses.”

There is an example where Verona teachers went one step further to use grouping to provide positive supports for a student with special needs. In this case, it was a student with special needs who was also very shy. One of his teachers explained that this student needed to do a lot of processing before he would move forward with anything so a special group was created for him that consisted of the student and the two teachers in the classroom. The student then decided what parts of the assignments he wanted to do and assigned other parts to the teachers. His teacher said that this grouping setup worked much better for the student because she said, “When he was in a group with other students he was too intimidated.”

One final way that Verona teachers’ approach to inclusion provided positive, proactive supports for students was their acceptance of a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge. In more traditional classrooms, students are frequently given one way to

show what they've learned and this is often through written assessments. Verona teachers offered many ways for students to communicate what they had learned, which provided more avenues for success. Some of these included giving oral answers to assessments rather than written; using creative approaches like drawing, composing a song or writing a poem to communicate knowledge; and demonstrating learning through performance assessments like participating in a mock trial rather than taking a test as a final unit assessment.

### **Finding 5: Natural distribution of students.**

As has been stated in previous findings, students with disabilities are naturally distributed throughout the student population with a few self-contained classes being offered in math and social studies. Within classes, students with disabilities are naturally distributed in student groups, with occasional ability grouping when reading level is a concern. As one history teacher explained, she often has students read historical fiction related to her current topic in the class. She chooses three or four books on the same topic, but at varying levels of difficulty, then has students choose the book that is best for their reading level. In this particular example, one of the book groups may have more students with disabilities related to reading, but the group would not be limited to students with disabilities. When the books are discussed in class, the teacher often creates new groups with representatives from the different reading groups so students can talk about the history theme drawing from all of the books being read. With the new groups, students become naturally distributed again. This same teacher said she even likes to break up "close friend groups" so that students learn to work with people other than the people with whom they spend most of their time. Again, the push for the natural distribution of students starts with the administration and filters out to the teachers and students. As one of the teachers highlighted in an interview, "Our principal is very supportive of inclusion. She wants to make sure that the kids are distributed equally."

### **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 Verona High School implements this principle.

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

Observations and interviews revealed that Verona High School teachers implement a wide variety of instructional strategies that are responsive to learner's needs, interests and abilities. Some of the strategies teachers used that students said they found particularly effective were active learning, group work and assignments in the form of projects. Students said they liked to be actively engaged in hands-on learning, rather than passively listening to lectures, and found that a majority of Verona High School teachers incorporated dynamic approaches to instruction. Some direct quotes by students about what they liked in classroom instruction include the following:

Mr. E. tells more stories than other teachers. His class is more exciting and he shows us more stuff.

Adolescent psychology. It's a great class, cuz everything applies to you. It applies right now. It makes you think about how you act.

The Algebra 2 teacher. She's great. She talks more like us. She associates with us better. She is very good at keeping our attention. She makes things interesting. To get our attention, she doesn't play games.

As the above quotes indicate, students feel more engaged in learning when the classroom teacher connects with them on a personal level, uses a variety of active approaches to present content and chooses curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to high school students. Multiple observations in Verona classroom showed teachers effectively engaging in all of these practices.

A second way that Verona High School teachers addressed students' needs and abilities in their classrooms was through using differentiated instruction and modifications for students with and without disabilities. An example of how teachers differentiated instruction was observed in a combined history and English classroom where Ms. W. the history teacher chose books at multiple levels of difficulty on the same topic. She assisted students in choosing books that were at an appropriate reading level and then ran book discussion groups that included students from across the different levels. In this way, all students were reading literature that enriched their historical content learning on a specific topic and were able to read books that were at the appropriate reading level. This technique supported students with and without disabilities because some of the students who needed easier texts were not the students with special needs. Because all reading groups included students with and without special needs, students with disabilities were not singled out.

In this same classroom, teachers also offered students alternatives to reading the class text. Ms. W. explained how this works:

One of the instructional practices I use to support learning is books on tape. We are doing "A Tale of Two Cities;" I told them they need to go to the library and get the book on tape. Because their version might be a little different, instead of doing highlighting, we have them do chapter summaries. I put together summaries for the students on characters and plot. For some kids, the summary is all they read so maybe that's not so good, but at least they get something out of the story.

It is interesting to note how willing this teacher is to use books on tape as an alternative to the main class text if it is going to help students learn. In more traditional classrooms, this type of modification might be considered cheating and students who needed modifications would be left to struggle. The importance of teachers making modifications like books on tape was noted by parents of students with special needs. One parent commented of her

son, "They have had to accept that he cannot read. They have had to do tapes. He has to have less to do than other kids. They have to have books on tape or I have to read with him. It has made a big difference in him wanting to come to school." The important difference resulting from using books on tape as a modification is that a student faced with reading challenges can still participate in the general education classroom and feel successful.

Another example of differentiated instruction was observed in a ceramics class. Mr. C., the ceramics teacher, prepared a list of projects that were due by the end of the semester and then left it up to the students to work at their own pace to complete the projects. Observations in the ceramics class showed students being very self-directed. Because the class was self-paced, students could work at an appropriate speed and level. Students who were faced with more challenges due to disabilities could complete the minimum of projects required at a slower pace, and the students who were more advanced could go beyond the minimum requirements as far as they were able. Rather than utilizing whole group instruction, Mr. C. taught new techniques and skills to the students who needed them when they needed them. Special education teachers and aides were also observed working in Mr. C.'s classroom and were able to provide assistance to individuals and small groups of students in a very natural way without disrupting the flow of the class. Students with special needs were observed being very successful and very engaged in the ceramics class.

Additional ways that Verona High School teachers made modifications to address individual needs and abilities included creating individualized assignments for students with special needs. This approach was facilitated by the close working relationships between special and general educators in the school. Because special education teachers frequently team taught with teachers in the general education classroom, they were very familiar with the general education curriculum. Knowledge of the curriculum combined with knowledge of the needs of the special education students in the classroom allowed the special education teachers to design assignments that were tailor made for each student. In this teaming situation, the special educator often did the evaluating of the student work. One special educator explained that she individualizes assignments by having each student do what she thinks they are capable of doing and then grading that effort and quality. Another option that was available to students with and without disabilities in many Verona classrooms was the choice to take a test or quiz in a resource room or other quiet place in the school. If students needed extra assistance with the test like having it read to them, they could go to a resource room and receive help, if the student just needed a place free from distractions, they were able to go to a quiet place in the school to complete the assessment. This procedure helped to meet the needs of any student who was easily distracted in a classroom full of students, especially during a higher stress situation like taking a test.

A final note about the modifications made by Verona teachers to address individual needs and abilities in their classrooms is the way the strategies were first utilized to assist students with special needs and then, due to their effectiveness, were used for all students. In an interview with a special educator, she explained that she started using videos as an

additional instructional tool to help students with special needs learn content. She said, “Now some of the mainstream teachers are doing that in their classrooms where they will read a book and then watch the video.” The ripple effect described by this special educator seems to support the Whole Schooling premise that instructional strategies that are effective for students with special needs are effective for all students. Verona High School demonstrates the many positive effects that can result when general and special educators work closely together to help all students succeed.

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

Verona High School teachers utilized a variety of motivating instructional practices that engaged students and reduced the need for individual accommodations. One of the first ways that Verona teachers made instruction motivating was through their high-energy, enthusiastic approach to teaching. The teachers demonstrated a passion for their content matter, that couldn't help but motivate their students. An example that exemplifies this enthusiasm was observed at the beginning of an algebra class. The teacher started each class with some math warm-ups and on this particular day she said, “This warm-up is awesome. I made it up myself, not to toot my own horn, but I think it's awesome. So get out your notebooks and write this down.” The teacher proceeded to expressively read the warm-up, highlighting important words and concepts as she read. Once the students started working on the problems, she circulated around the classroom offering encouragement like, “There you go. You're doing great;” “Good steps, lots of good steps;” and “There are some good ideas out there, even some I didn't come up with.” Student interviews revealed positive reactions to teachers who were enthusiastic in their approach to teaching calling these teachers “nice,” “interesting,” and “exciting.”

A second way Verona teachers motivated students, was by utilizing a wide variety of engaging, hands-on approaches to learning. Observations showed teachers using field trips, experiments, simulations, projects, videos, games and demonstrations to engage students and present content information. The following section from an observer's notes exemplifies the variety of motivating instructional practices employed in Verona classrooms:

The class is studying the French Revolution. They did a simulation of the estates yesterday. Today they are making visuals describing the characteristics of the estate they represented yesterday. Tomorrow they will be doing a play created by [the teachers] that demonstrates the different people, from the Royals on down to the peons.

Student interviews revealed that the variety of hands-on approaches utilized by Verona teachers impacted student attitudes about learning in a positive way. One student with special needs, when asked what works in his school said, “We've taken a few field trips. Like we were talking about roof designs. [The teacher] took us out to farms to see what they really look like. Some of them [the roofs] are more round and [have] more channels.” This same student said that in a veterinary class in which he is enrolled, “We are going to the animal hospital in Verona, its just a few blocks away.” As this student's

comments revealed the field trips taken by Verona teachers and students were not frill activities, but learning activities that were integral to the topics and content being covered. In another class, students were studying Buddhism and were able to take a field trip to a Buddhist center in Madison to hear an authentic presentation on the religion. The close proximity to Madison provided Verona teachers with many field trip options that they would not have were they located elsewhere. Observations and interviews indicate that Verona teachers took advantage of the many area resources to involve students in meaningful field trips.

In another student interview, the interviewee said she really liked the variety of class projects from which they were able to choose. She said in one class she was able to choose from a variety of projects including creating a poster or a model of a church with “quick facts” about the church written on the poster or model. Being offered alternatives to reading were also strategies this same student found motivating. She said one of her teachers had students cutting out information related to the topic they were learning from magazines “instead of just reading.” Videos were another alternative to reading that this student found effective. She said, “I am more of a visual learner. We spent a whole period watching people’s heads get cut off, and that got our attention.” While reading is an important skill students need to utilize to find information and learn content, Verona teachers responded to the needs and interests of their students by finding alternative ways to present information. Students today are bombarded with visual information in their lives outside of school, so Verona High School teachers are encouraged to continue to utilize a variety of ways to present curriculum. Drawing from a variety of instructional strategies for presenting information is helpful for all students, but is especially important for students with disabilities related to one particular learning technique like reading. A third way Verona teachers made instruction motivating was by designing classroom lessons that incorporated real life skills and activities. Some courses naturally lend themselves to including real life skills like the Foods class Verona High School students could take. In this class, students were involved in activities like grilling hamburgers, brats and hot dogs, taking a field trip to the grocery store to examine different cuts of meat, making soup stock from scratch, and baking and taste-testing apple pie. Students with and without disabilities were observed actively engaged in the foods class and learning cooking skills that will be of use far beyond the end of high school.

Another class Verona students could choose that incorporated many real life skills was horticulture. In the horticulture class, students moved between a regular classroom and the school’s greenhouse lab room. In the greenhouse lab, students learned to take plant cuttings, pot and root new plants, fertilize and water in appropriate amounts, create wreaths and centerpieces, and design flowerbeds. Students with special needs were included in the horticulture class and participated successfully. In one observation, two students with special needs, who generally needed quite a bit of attention and liked to be on the move, were kept actively engaged by the horticulture teacher. He had one of the students creating a poinsettia centerpiece and sign to advertise an upcoming Christmas poinsettia sale and the other student weaving grapevines to make a flower basket. The teacher provided a lot of encouragement for the students’ efforts and they stayed involved for the entire class period.

While many motivating instructional practices were observed in Verona High School, parents, teachers and students acknowledged that there were some teachers that still relied heavily on one approach to instruction, usually lecture. Student interviews indicated that the lecture approach was used most often in mandatory academic courses, probably because teachers in these courses often feel a great deal of pressure to “cover content.” Lecturing can be an efficient method for covering content and can be quite effective when used in moderation. The drawback to relying exclusively on lecture is that it is a passive approach to learning and one that many students find boring. Using lecture as the primary method of instruction can be especially detrimental to students with special needs who are unable to process large amounts of auditory information in a condensed period of time. For these students, lecture only can create a huge roadblock to learning. To prove this point, one student with special needs said, “I have some teachers that just lecture and I just go to sleep.” Due to the importance of incorporating a wide variety of motivating instructional strategies to increase student engagement and learning, Verona High School administrators and teachers may want to explore ways to reach out to teachers who rely primarily on lecture and to provide opportunities for all teachers to learn new instructional techniques.

### **Finding 3: “Authentic” curriculum and instructional practices are implemented.**

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 Verona High School.

The first content area where authentic curriculum and instructional practices were observed was science. Because of the investigative, experimental nature of science, this subject seemed to easily lend itself to the use of authentic practices, and many engaging science activities were observed being implemented in Verona High School. One example is the pond study that was carried out in an integrated math and science class. For the purposes of completing the study, a group of 40 students and three teachers walked to a stream near the high school called the “Sugar River Basin Water Restoration Project. Students worked in small groups and completed a series of experiments on the stream water like measuring temperature, oxygen content, nitrate content and ph levels. Students collected the same data in the fall and spring of the school year so they could compare the results and document any changes that occurred. The main objective of the stream study 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 stream 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.

Another example of an authentic instructional practice in science was observed in a biology class. Students had recently completed a unit on human anatomy and physiology and were applying their knowledge in a dissection activity. Students were working in



small groups to dissect a pig. Each group had a worksheet with questions to answer and reflections to write as they dissected their pig. Students were observed being totally engaged in the activity and comments ranged from “It’s gross,” to “This is cool.” When asked why a pig was chosen for dissection, the teacher responded, “Because a pig is so much more closely related to our own system.” Students who participated in this activity had constructed important background knowledge on human anatomy and physiology before dissecting the pig and then applied the knowledge as they examined the anatomy of the pig. An understanding of the workings of the human body is knowledge students can use and apply in many real life situations.

A second area where authentic instructional practices were observed was in a horticulture class. Over the course of the fall semester, students engaged in a series of authentic activities to prepare for a Christmas poinsettia sale. Students learned to make plant cuttings to start their poinsettia plants and then put them into pots to root. During one classroom observation, students were getting an in-depth lesson on fertilizers. Students learned about organic vs. inorganic fertilizers and also about the benefits of adding phosphorus or acid to plant soil. The information students learned about fertilizers was then used to achieve desired results with the poinsettia plants. The students worked in groups and engaged in a series of experiments studying the effects of different fertilizers and the effects of different amounts of water on their plants. The teacher explained to the students that he learned as much from these experiments as they do so they needed to keep track of what they did. The culmination of the students’ plant growing efforts was the annual Christmas poinsettia sale. This provided a real-life purpose for growing and caring for the poinsettia plants over the course of the fall semester. A humorous endnote to this story is just as in real life, things don’t always turn out the way one expects. Despite the teacher’s best efforts, one student in the class planted her poinsettia plant upside down.

A final example of an authentic approach to curriculum and instruction was observed in an integrated history and English class. Students were studying the Spanish conquest of the Native American population in the South and were participating in a mock trial as a final assessment to the unit. The mock trial was focused on the actions and treatment of the parties involved. The class was divided into witnesses, defendants, the jury and lawyers, and the teacher acted as the judge. Students self-selected their roles and completed in-depth research on the historical events of the time period in order to prepare for their parts. The trial was videotaped to enable the teacher to go back through it to assess each student’s preparation, knowledge and performance. The students submitted witness statements and defense and prosecution briefs prior to the actual trial. Nothing could be presented beyond what was in the briefs or witness statements. Witness and defendant profiles were also submitted. The students were expected to dress the part of their roles. They swore to tell the truth according to their character sketches. There was a witness seat and a podium, with the class members arrayed around the room as the audience. Some of the costumes were very imaginative, with coats and staffs for the chief and farmers, long skirts and kerchiefs for the women. This mock trial assessment is an excellent example of authentic instruction in action. Students constructed knowledge both about the historical events surrounding the Spanish conquest of Native Americans in the South and the workings of the court system. Students were then able to apply their knowledge in an

authentic role-playing activity. Both general and special education students were included in this mock trial final examination. Not surprisingly, it was impossible to identify the students with special needs in the class.

#### **Finding 4: Instructional practices integrate curriculum.**

As has been reported under previous findings, Verona High School teachers collaborate across discipline areas and often team teach in the same classroom. This practice lends itself naturally to integrating curriculum. For example, one of the collaborations observed was between a history teacher and English teacher. These teachers found ways to integrate all of their content. If the topic in history was the French Revolution, students learned about the time period and applied English skills by writing a letter in the voice of someone in prison and describing the reasons for his/her imprisonment and the prison conditions at the time. The assignments students completed in the class were graded by both teachers. The history teacher assessed for historical knowledge and accuracy of information and the English teacher assessed for writing techniques. Of this integrated approach to giving and grading assignments the history teacher said, “I just love when kids come to me [with an assignment] and they say, ‘I don’t know what teacher to give this to because everything is so integrated.’”

In this same combined history and English class, students were observed completing another project that exemplifies curriculum integration. The assignment was a persuasive speech students were to give on a topic of their choosing. Some of the topics students chose included animal rights, eating disorders, sweat shops, the testing and use of experimental drugs and trying minors in adult courts. Through completing this assignment, students learned and practiced a variety of reading and writing skills. Students utilized library and Internet resources to gather background information on their topic. Students also learned the correct format for a business letter, which they used to write to an organization or expert to get information related to their topic. For example, the student doing research on the testing and use of experimental drugs wrote a business letter to the FDA. In gathering research for her speech on sweatshops, another student read about a contact person in a magazine article. She got the name and address from the article and wrote her business letter to this person to get more information on sweatshops. Not only were students learning a variety of reading and writing skills, they were applying these skills in authentic ways. Rather than writing a fake business letter to a non-existent person that only the classroom teacher reads, these students were learning that the benefit to knowing how to write a business letter is that it is a way to communicate with real people and obtain information. This example also shows the integration of technology into the curriculum. Students used the Internet to research their topic, did searches of the UW-Madison library online and sent emails to various individuals and organizations to gather background information.

Similar examples of integrated instruction were observed in other combined classes. Some of the combinations included in the Whole Schooling Research study besides the world history and English class include consumer education and math, and science and math. There may be additional collaborations at Verona High School that were not observed. Verona High School administration and teachers are to be commended for the

degree of curriculum integration observed in their classrooms. Collaborations across discipline areas are not always found in high schools where teachers tend to stay within their areas of expertise. Participating in cross-discipline collaborations reduces teacher isolation, creates new possibilities for student activities and assignments that include multiple subject areas and helps students to see that learning occurs in natural, integrated ways.

### **Finding 5: Major determiners of learning.**

There were many factors that influenced the degree to which students were encouraged and able to learn in Verona High School. 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. Some additional factors that contributed to learning observed in Verona classrooms and mentioned in interviews were small class sizes, clear expectations for students and positive relationships between teachers and students.

Verona class sizes were relatively small especially for high school classes. Most of the classes observed had 20 students or less. Many classes were closer to 15. The only classes observed that were larger than 20 were the combined classes that had as many as 40 students, but also had two teachers. While a 15 to 1 pupil to teacher ratio is already quite low, in many classrooms it was even lower than that because of special education teachers and aides who were also present. The small classes and low pupil to teacher ratios facilitated inclusion and made it possible for teachers to meet the needs of all students. The benefits of small classes were noted by students. When asked what worked in the school, one student with special needs responded, “Smaller classes. I learn a lot more in them and feel like I can ask more questions.”

Verona teachers supported learning through the communication of clear expectations. Classes often began with teachers explaining what students would be accomplishing during the class period and reminders of upcoming assignments and tests. Teachers were also observed utilizing written directions, checklists and rubrics to help students understand exactly what students were to include in assignments and how they would be assessed. The principal of the school even said she noticed an increase in the use of rubrics by teachers to communicate clear expectations to students. Teachers also reminded students to keep their materials organized and record assignment information in their notebooks.

One final factor that supported learning in Verona classrooms was the caring relationships teachers had with students. Teachers’ interactions with students went beyond discussions of subject matter and addressed students’ fears and interests. For example, one teacher shared that right after the Columbine shootings, she spent a full class period allowing students to share their feelings about what had happened. Teachers seemed to really know the students on a personal level and communicated respect and concern for each student. By encouraging honest dialogue and acknowledging that students’ lives included much more than academics, Verona teachers allowed students to bring their whole selves to the classroom, which facilitated learning.

## **Principle 4: BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING**

Principle four focuses on the school's practices for building an effective and supportive learning community. This often requires the use of specialized school and community resources (e.g., special education, Title 1, gifted education) to build support for students, parents and teachers. This principle also focuses on building community and mutual support within the classroom. Finally, providing proactive supports for students with behavioral challenges is a necessary ingredient. The following findings and examples illustrate Verona High School's commitment to Principle 4.

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

One of the primary ways Verona High School used staff time creatively is the many ways that teachers collaborated and team taught. Teachers across discipline areas were observed teaching together in the same classroom, as well as general and special educators. In general education classrooms where there were three or more students with special needs, there was a special education teacher or aide in the room serving as a resource. In some classes, the general and special educator co-taught and the special educator was observed presenting a lesson or giving a test. In other classes, special educators shared that they were more like assistants where they made instant modifications and even ran copies for teachers when teachers were short. The benefits to the many creative teacher collaborations in Verona High School have been highlighted throughout the previous principles and include the natural and seamless modifications teachers were able to make for students with and without disabilities, the implementation of authentic and integrated curriculum, the utilization of a wide variety of instructional strategies and the low pupil to student ratios.

Another creative way Verona teachers worked together is the practice of teachers in the school providing in-service training for one another. In an interview with the principal she said she wanted her teachers to seek out internal expertise and there was evidence that this was occurring in Verona High School. In an interview with a learning resource coordinator, she shared that she worked with another teacher in the school to present a "mini-workshop" on the computer program "Inspirations." She said the technology coordinator set up a projection system so that she could demonstrate how the program worked as she talked about its uses in the classroom. The teachers who attended the workshop then came up with an application project for the program in their classrooms. The benefits of sponsoring internal in-service like the Inspirations workshop are that teachers are hearing from colleagues they know about how to implement a particular teaching strategy and how it works with students. This also means there are built-in supports if a teacher tries a new strategy and wants to talk about it with others in the school. The "expert" on the topic/strategy is located right in the school and is easily accessible.

Another creative use of available staff and time was the presence of a Day Care center in the school. Having a Day Care center right in the school made it possible for high school students with children to continue attending high school. Students were observed spending time in the Day Care Center periodically throughout the school day to feed and

care for their children. In addition to providing childcare, staff running and working in the center teach parenting skills to the high school-aged parents.

### **Finding 2: Natural peer supports.**

Verona High School students had many opportunities to serve as supports for one another. As has been described under previous findings, Verona teachers utilized student groups frequently in classroom activities and experimental labs and also for having students complete course assignments and projects. When Verona teachers grouped students they made it a priority to naturally distribute students with and without disabilities so that each group had a range of student backgrounds and abilities. In this way, students learned to appreciate the different strengths and talents their peers brought to the group. Teachers commented that students worked well together and that general education students were “really good about helping students with special needs during groupwork.” Teachers encouraged the students to draw on the strengths of all of the group members and to practice good communication skills. In one classroom observation, a history teacher was explaining a new group project assignment to the students and she encouraged them to find out if they had an artist in the group and to incorporate art into their project. She went on to say that if a group had someone who was strong in math they could bring math into their project by including charts and graphs. By approaching a group project in this manner, the teacher was helping students to focus on the talents possessed by each of their peers rather than on their weaknesses or disabilities.

In addition to working together in groups, students were also given opportunities to provide one another with peer feedback/assessment. This was observed in an integrated history and English class where students were giving oral presentations. Each student stood to give his/her report on a topic they had researched and referred to notecards on which they had written pertinent information. Other students in the class provided support in several ways. One student videotaped the presentations, another kept track of time and the rest listened intently to the person speaking. At the end of the speech, all of the students in the class gave the presenter feedback on a piece of scratch paper. Since each student in the class got and gave feedback, they were able to learn the importance of providing supportive feedback because each student knew sooner or later they would be on the receiving end. Building in peer feedback also encouraged students to listen more intently to their classmates’ presentations because they had to make specific comments about what was said and how it was said.

One final way Verona High School facilitated peer supports was through a peer-tutoring program. Peer tutoring was available in the school where students with and without disabilities could get extra help with schoolwork. One of the teachers who participated in the Whole Schooling Research project served as coordinator for peer tutors. Again, this is a valuable way for students who serve as tutors to learn the skills of helping and teaching another person and for the students getting help to learn that they can turn to a classmate to receive support.

### **Finding 3: Provide positive, proactive supports for behavior management.**

Verona High School teachers provided positive, proactive supports for behavior management in several ways. First, teachers helped to avoid behavior problems by implementing an engaging and authentic curriculum as was highlighted under Principle 3. In classrooms where students were actively involved in meaningful activities and assignments, teachers had fewer discipline problems. The differentiated curriculum that teachers developed and the modifications they designed for students with special needs also helped to ensure that students were getting instruction at the appropriate level and helped to prevent discipline problems. In the classrooms where general and special education teachers collaborated and co-taught, they were frequently observed nipping potential discipline problems in the bud. The special educator made modifications and worked with individual and small groups of students who needed extra help in the classroom. With students who needed quite a bit of assistance, a special educator or aide would work one-on-one with them to keep them engaged and on track with classroom activities. While one teacher focused his/her attention on teaching, the other teacher was able to circulate and focus on specific needs of the students. This helped to keep disruptions and behavior problems to a minimum.

Other factors that helped to prevent discipline problems included the enthusiasm exhibited by teachers for their subject matter, the positive, caring relationships teachers had with students and the ways teachers engaged students in their classrooms. Verona teachers rarely remained in the front of the classroom, rather they moved about interacting with students, answering questions and offering encouragement. In this way, teachers kept students involved and prevented problems from getting off the ground.

Verona High School also had a “No Tolerance” policy towards drugs and violence. As one teacher explained, “Consistency is important. Maintaining discipline is important. Our students really need to know what the boundaries are and when they go over them, we have to let them know right away.”

While a “No Tolerance” policy might be used in a punitive fashion, Verona students seemed to understand that the consistency and swiftness with which problems were addressed in their school created a safer environment for everyone. A teacher shared that after the Columbine shootings, her class had an hour-long discussion about what had happened and why. She said the students in her class didn’t think something like the Columbine tragedy would have happened in Verona High School because of the “No Tolerance” policy. The students felt the problem of the “Trench coat Mafia” would have been addressed long before it got to be the problem it was at Columbine High School.

There was some evidence of extrinsic rewards being used for behavior management. In one class students earned tickets for getting correct answers. The tickets were then used for a weekly drawing to earn prizes. The prizes included homework coupons, extra-credit points, candy bars, and Culvers coupons. While using extrinsic rewards for shaping behavior can achieve the desired effects, this may be an area that Verona administration and teachers want to continue to discuss and monitor so that the long term focus remains

on building an intrinsic desire on the part of students for positive social relationships and lifelong learning.

### **Principle 5: PARTNERING**

Partnering refers to building genuine collaboration within the school and with families and the community; engaging the school in strengthening the community; providing guidance to engage students, parents, teachers and others in decision-making and direction of learning and school activities.

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

There were several ways that Verona High School joined together with families, community members and university faculty to benefit all. First, teachers communicated with parents through formal means like progress reports, monthly newsletters, parent conferences, phone calls and emails. Many teachers even expressed comfort with giving out their home phone numbers so parents could call them at home. A second way the school joined with parents was through an open house the school hosts at the beginning of the school year. A third way of reaching out to parents on the part of Verona teachers was more informal. One teacher said, “I attend a lot of sporting events. I run into parents there and I can talk to them about concerns in an informal way.” Although Verona is growing rapidly, it still has enough of a small community feel that teachers, parents and other community members were able to have informal contact with one another on a day-to-day basis.

There was some evidence of Verona High School reaching out to the larger Verona community. One example was the career fair that community business members and school staff work together to present for students. Other examples include opportunities to job shadow, and job opportunities provided by community businesses for students. School members found community members to be supportive of the school as far as attending school athletic and other events and donating money, goods and services for school sponsored endeavors.

As far as joining together with university faculty, Verona High School is fortunate in its proximity to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students in the school were observed using the Internet to search the university library and emailing university faculty to obtain research information. The closeness of the UW also made it possible for teachers and administrators in the school to take graduate courses and work on advanced degrees. A final benefit to having the university so close was the ability to get student teachers, interns and other volunteers from the university who wanted to gain experience in the classroom. This relationship was mutually beneficial in that the university students were able to acquire valuable classroom teaching experience and Verona High School gained extra hands in the classroom.

## **Finding 2: Collaboration and co-teaching strengthens the overall school community and learning experiences.**

The many ways that Verona High School teachers collaborate and co-teach have been highlighted repeatedly throughout the Whole Schooling principles. General education teachers across disciplines like history and English, math and science, geography and history, and math and consumer education were observed team teaching in the same classroom. Benefits to cross-discipline collaborations include the reduction of teacher isolation and the increase of authentic, integrated curriculum and instruction. Having two teachers teaming together in a classroom also seems to increase the instructional strategies from which the teachers choose, possibly due to combining creative juices and having the ability to implement activities that would be difficult for an individual teacher to carry out.

General and special education teachers and aides also worked closely together, including co-teaching in the general education classroom. The policy at Verona High School was to have a special education teacher or aide acting as a resource in any classroom that had three or more students with special needs. If one-on-one assistance was needed, that was also provided in the general education classroom. This kind of collaboration between special and general educators helped to reduce student to teacher ratios, provided needed assistance and modifications for students with and without disabilities and increased the range of instructional strategies from which educators could draw to meet the needs of all student. Observations in Verona classrooms revealed very active and dynamic co-teaching relationships between general and special educators. In one class, the special educator was teaching students how to splint a broken bone, in another special education aides were helping students to shape ceramic products with clay and in a third, the special and general educator were acting out the non-begging method of giving practiced by Buddhist monks. General and special educators worked well together as indicated in an interview with one special education teacher when she said, “I have to compliment the staff here, they are willing to make modifications. They sometimes come to me and say, ‘I was thinking of making this modification for this kid, do you think this might work?’ We really try to avoid phrases like ‘my students’ and ‘your students.’ I think that does help in thinking about that. We are pretty much on the same page.”

Verona High School also had a learning resource coordinator in the school who collaborated with general and special educators to assist students in the reading area. In an interview, the learning resource coordinator explained that a teacher could come to her and say that a student is bombing every biology test s/he is taking and she would work with the teacher to figure out what the problem is, especially if it is a reading problem. She said in the course of her job, she frequently conferred with special educators in the building to get their input on problems students might be having. She said the special educators appreciated her special expertise in reading, an area in which some of them had less training. A final service the learning resource coordinator provided was shared by a history teacher who differentiated her instruction by choosing books of varying levels of difficulty on the same topic. She said the learning resource coordinator made recommendations for books she could use in her classroom. She concluded by saying she found the support especially helpful in finding appropriate books for struggling readers.



Teacher collaboration was supported in many ways by Verona High School administration. Administrators encouraged team teaching and designed schedules that provided common prep times for teachers who worked together. The administration also sponsored across-school focus groups that looked at assessment and curriculum issues and structured in-service days around communication and networking. Kelly Meyers, the building principal explained that if teams of teachers come to her and say they need a half-day to work together on a project or problem, she “will get them a half day.” She went on to say that she hires subs so she can release the teachers to work together. A final technique Verona High School administrators use to support faculty dialogue and collaboration is by encouraging interactive faculty meetings. Kelly Meyers explained that, “sit and get takes place through email, not in faculty meetings.” Verona High School administrators are to be commended for their support of teacher collaboration and are encouraged to continue to provide creative ways for teachers to work together.

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

There were many ways that Verona parents and students were supported by school staff. Some of these were mentioned previously such as the focus on communication with parents through newsletters, conferences, progress reports, phone calls and emails. Teachers also said they communicate with parents through “good news postcards” and other special notes home to communicate information or to ask for permission for testing students. In addition, the school sponsors parent groups where special service staff work with parents and provide information and assistance on a variety of issues.

Students with special needs and their parents benefit from the above forms of communication and also receive some additional supports. One of these is the case manager that is assigned to each student with special needs. The case managers are multi-categorical and stay with a student for two to three years. Interviews indicate that both students and their parents appreciate the role the case manager plays in their lives. A student with special needs explained how the case manager worked with him and his parents, “Sometimes my case manager might call home. Just to let them [his parents] know how I am doing and when we should have another conference.” The student went on to say that he attended the conferences with the case manager and his parents and he said, “I like that, it’s kind of neat to see everything.” Parents of students with special needs shared how important contact with the case manager was for them. One parent said that the previous year her son’s case manager had given her weekly progress reports so she could monitor her son’s grades. She said she used the information to help remind her son to self-monitor. Another parent said that her son’s case manager was in touch once a month if things were going well and weekly if things were not going well. Because Verona High School students with special needs take a wide variety of courses and come into contact different general and special education teachers and aides, it makes a lot of sense to have a person serving in the role of case manager to oversee the services and education provided to that student. The only suggestion for changing the case manager system was given by a parent. She said, “I wish that each student could stay with the same support resource person for the full four years, instead of changing after two years.”

Parents of students with special needs expressed appreciation for the modifications that Verona teachers were willing to do for their children. Some of the modifications parents mentioned were requiring less work, offering books on tape as an alternative to the written text, and allowing students to take tests in a resource room where a special education teacher or aide could read the test. While the majority of parent comments were positive, one parent said not all teachers were offered the same level of support. She said, “Some teachers haven’t made accommodations for him very well.” With the size of the Verona High School staff, there is bound to be variance across teachers as far as their willingness to modify their curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students. Verona High School has made great strides in this area and is encouraged to continue to explore new ways to include all students and to educate and train teachers who have not discovered the benefits that inclusion provides for students with and without disabilities.

There are some additional programs available to Verona High School students that have not been mentioned under previous findings. The first of these is called VIP, which is an alternative school aimed at credit-deficient upper classmen who have struggled in the traditional high school setting. The stated goal of VIP is to provide students with an academically challenging, standards-based curriculum that focuses on the core credits; a supportive environment with smaller class sizes; and an opportunity to earn accelerated credits toward graduation. VIP staff try to create a feeling of community to provide support for students who have not been successful in traditional high school classes.

“Reach” and “Unity” are two more programs offered to Verona High School students. “Reach” is designed to assist people preparing for HSED exams through academic study and career exploration. “Unity” is a program provided for students who are at-risk but not eligible for special education or 504. “Unity” is run similar to a resource room. Beyond special programs like VIP, Reach and Unity, Verona High School also will work with students who need a shortened school day, work release, correspondence courses, or the special services provided by private and government schools.

## **Conclusions**

When reviewing all of the research data, there were some additional items that emerged that warrant further discussion and investigation. The first of these was a concern expressed by a special educator about a new law allowing students with special needs to stay in high school until age 22. The teacher shared that there was no precedent set for what happens to these students in the additional years. She asked, “Can they take high school classes? Do they just get vocational classes?” The teacher explained in the past that in the past the only students who stayed for additional years were “a few students with CD.” She said with the new policy, more students were staying until age 22. She concluded by saying, “We need to figure out the dialogue we are going to write on this to make very clear what the options are for kids who decide to stay until 22.”

Another item that emerged was a desire to have an increased focus across the curriculum on reading comprehension, critical thinking and multiculturalism. The principal expressed a desire to have more teachers “embrace the teachable moment and let go of their content.” She said she felt that in the long run teachers would be able to get further in

their content by connecting more with students on a personal level. She said, “The students will love you for it and respect you for it, if you just take the time to get to know them. A lot of my teachers do that, but I would like more of them to do it.”

As a result of participating in the Whole Schooling Research Project, one teacher expressed a desire to set up a networking system to share effective programs and techniques for inclusion with other schools. This teacher felt that sharing across schools would be quite beneficial and might result in cross-school visits and meetings.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to have Verona High School as a research site in the Whole Schooling Research project. Thank you to Kelly Meyers and all of the teachers, parents and students who participated in the project. A special thanks to Jo Anderson who served as a contact person and arranged many of the observations and interviews.