

# Redland Middle School Case Study

Prepared for  
The Maryland State Department of Education  
Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State of Maryland

By

Amaya Garcia  
Maryland Equity Project

Under supervision of Picus Odden & Associates.

Case study developed as a part of the firm's  
Evidence-based adequacy study for Maryland  
The work was a subcontract from APA Consulting.

See Policy Impact 2016 and Resources/Cases of Improving Schools at  
[www.PicusOdden.com](http://www.PicusOdden.com)

October 2015



### *Executive Summary*

Redland Middle School is an example of the fourth category of schools – a school that has significantly reduced the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers.

Redland Middle School is located in the Rockville area of Montgomery County Public Schools. The school has a diverse student population – 34 percent are Hispanic, 17 percent are African American, 11 percent are Asian, and 33 percent are white. Forty percent of the school's students are eligible for the federal free and reduced-price meals (FRPM) program.

Between 2007 and 2012, Redland saw large gains in student achievement on the Maryland State Assessment (MSA), particularly for low-income students. During this period the proficiency rates of FRPM eligible students rose by 24 percentage points from 46 to 70 percent, and there was a decrease in the poverty achievement gap at the school.

Interviews with staff members and the current and former principals point to several factors that have contributed to these increases in student achievement:

1. Data-driven school improvement initiatives. Root cause analysis is used to determine school goals and set the focus for School Improvement Plans (SIP). The process allows the school leadership team to drill down and set targeted (and achievable) goals that focus on specific groups of students for the benefit of the whole school. In the words of one teacher, “What is good for one is good for all.”
2. Focus on school climate. Several initiatives have been implemented to foster a positive school climate. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) provide students with rewards for positive behavior but also facilitate the creation of school-wide expectations and the use of a common language. Student town halls are held every quarter so that school staff and leadership can hear student perspectives on what is happening. Students are also rewarded for strong academic performance via honor roll celebrations and the “Top Dog” award.
3. Multiple interventions. The school has multiple academic interventions such as after-school tutoring, Saturday school, and extended-day programs. An advisory period is used to foster relationships between teachers and students, and to deliver small group instruction. Behavioral interventions include the Alt 1 classroom for students with behavior and other challenges and the school-wide PBIS program that sets expectations and provides incentives for positive student behavior.

4. Teacher support and professional development. Teachers meet for collaborative planning twice a week and for team meetings twice a week. Professional development is held every Monday. Teachers' professional development is led by the staff development teacher and English language teacher development coach, and focuses on providing strategies for implementing instructional practices aligned with the school improvement plan.

*Introduction*

Redland Middle School is located in Rockville, a city located in the Montgomery County Public Schools district. The community is racially and socioeconomically diverse. In fall 2014, Redland enrolled 545 students in grades six to eight. Overall, core class sizes averaged 27 students, with the following average class sizes by grade-level and subject as shown in Table 1:<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Redland Middle School Class Sizes**

<b>Grade-level and Subject</b>	<b>Class Size</b>
Grade Six	
English	25
Math	27
Science	29
Grade Seven	
English	27
Math	21
Science	32
Grade Eight	
English	26
Math	30
Science	26

Redland is located in a community that includes “some multi-million [dollar] homes, to town homes, to subsidized homes, [and] some apartment complexes,” as described by the school’s former principal. The community has changed over time as has the enrollment at the school. In 2002, enrollment peaked at 945 students and declined to 507 students by 2013 (which is below the school’s capacity of 735 students). Those numbers inched up to 545 in the 2014-15 school year and enrollment is projected to increase to 700 by the 2019-2020 school year.

The student body is 34 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Asian, 17 percent African American, and 33 percent white. The demographics have changed in recent years as more Hispanic families have moved into the area. One teacher noted that during his tenure the school had gone from predominantly white to predominantly Latino.

Forty percent of students qualify for FRPM, compared to the average of 34 percent in the district’s other middle schools. Eleven percent of students have limited English proficiency. The percentage of LEP students doubled between 2011 and 2012, and is slightly higher than the

---

<sup>1</sup> These are the averages for grade-level courses and do not include honors or advanced sections.

district rate of nine percent.<sup>2</sup> Ten percent of students receive special education services, which is lower than the district rate of 11 percent. Table 2 shows the number of students by student subgroup attending Redland Middle School.

**Table 2**  
**Redland Middle School Student Characteristics**

Student Characteristics	Percentage of Redland Student Population
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-
Asian	11
Black/African American	17
Hispanic/Latino	34
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-
White	33
Two or more races	6
Eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM)	40
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	11
Special education students	11

A “-“ indicates either no students or the number of students was suppressed due to too few students in the category.

In the fall of 2014, Redland underwent a change in school leadership. The former principal who had led the school since 2008 departed at the end of the 2013-14 school year. The current principal was in his second year at the school at the time of the site visit. He joined the school in the fall of 2013 as part of the district’s principal intern program. That program prepares assistant principals to become principals. The data used to document gains in student achievement correspond to the former principal’s tenure at Redland.

Starting in 2007, Redland Middle School made consistent progress in closing the achievement gap between high-poverty and lower-poverty students.

This case investigates how Redland achieved the reductions in poverty achievement gaps. The report has 11 sections: 1) school performance, 2) school staffing, 3) goals, 4) school schedule, 5) curriculum and instructional program, 6) assessments, 7) interventions and supports, 8) collaborative teams and professional development, 9) school culture and leadership, 10)

---

<sup>2</sup> The district rates presented are for middle schools only.

summary, and 11) degree of alignment between the school’s strategies and the school improvement strategies embedded in the evidence-based (EB) funding model.

**School Performance**

Table 3 shows the composite data used to select Redland Middle School as a case study site. The percentage of students who are proficient or advanced across all subjects (reading and math in grades six through eight, and science in grade eight) was averaged to produce a number – percent proficient/ advanced – for each year from 2007 to 2012. For 2013 and 2014, only the “All Students” scores were available.

**Table 3  
Redland Middle School Performance, Maryland School Assessment (MSA), 2007-2012**

<b>Average School-Wide Percent Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading, Math and Science</b>								
<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>MSA 2007</b>	<b>MSA 2008</b>	<b>MSA 2009</b>	<b>MSA 2010</b>	<b>MSA 2011</b>	<b>MSA 2012</b>	<b>MSA* 2013</b>	<b>MSA* 2014</b>
All Students	72	73	78	79	79	81	79	78
Free and Reduce-Priced Meals (FRPM) Students	46	52	59	60	65	70	NA	NA
Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students	39	38	54	39	42	38	NA	NA
Special Education Students	29	38	51	50	54	56	NA	NA
Non-White/ Non-Asian Students	50	57	63	64	67	70	NA	NA

\*Assessment data by student subgroup for 2013 and 2014 were not available at the time this report was written.

During the latter two-year time period, the state’s curriculum standards changed, but the test did not. Statewide test score results dropped over these two years. Schools that had a drop of less than one standard deviation were given preference for selection as a case study site. Redland’s composite test scores dropped slightly in 2013 to 79 percent and again in 2014 to 78 percent.

The data demonstrate the growth that has taken place over the past several years. In particular, the MSA scores of students eligible for FRPM increased by 24 percentage points between 2007 and 2012. Similar gains were made for non-white/non-Asian students (20 percentage points) and even larger gains were made in the test scores of special education students (27 percentage points). These statistics are notable given the persistently large academic achievement gaps often seen for these subgroups.

This case attempts to tell the story of how Redland produced these improvements in student performance. It draws on interviews with the school's current and former principals, classroom teachers, other school administrators, and support staff. Documents, such as the school schedule and school improvement plan were provided by the principal and supplemented with materials available on the [school website](#) and the Maryland State Report Card website.

### *School Staffing*

The principal is in his second year leading the school. He joined the school in the fall of 2013 as part of the district's principal intern program. That program prepares assistant principals to become principals. The former principal led the school from 2008 to 2013 and is now at a different school.

During the 2008-2009 school year, a number of staff members left the school. An exact number was not specified, nor was the reason for their departures. Since then teacher attrition has been about five to seven percent a year.

Table 4 shows the school's staff by full-time equivalent (FTE) position. Redland's administration includes a principal, an assistant principal, and an assistant school administrator. Additionally, the school's clerical staff includes three school secretaries, a data analyst, and one financial assistant. Support staff includes food service workers, a part-time lunch aid, a security assistant and several building services personnel.

**Table 4**  
**Staffing at Redland Middle School**

<b>Category</b>	<b>FTE</b>
<u>Administration</u>	
Principal	1.0
Assistant Principal	1.0
Assistant School Administrator	1.0
<u>Clerical/Support Staff</u>	
School Secretaries	3.0
School Financial Specialist	1.0
Instructional Data Analyst	0.75
Security Assistant	1.0
Lunch Hour Aide	0.5
Food Services	2.625
Building Services	6.0
<u>Main Program</u>	
Core Teachers	19.9
Elective Teachers	7.5
Instructional Coaches	3.2
Compacted Instruction	0.4
LEP Teachers	1.06
Alternative Program Teacher	0.8
Special Education Teachers	3.8
Special Education Resource Teachers	2.0
<u>Educational Assistants</u>	
Paraprofessional	0.375
Paraprofessional Special Education	3.5
Media Assistant	0.5
Lunch Hour Aide	0.5
<u>Pupil Support</u>	
Counselors	2.0
Nurse	1.0
Health Room Tech	1.0
Speech Pathologist	0.6
Media Specialist	1.0
Reading Specialist	1.0
Math Focus Teacher	1.0
Academic Intervention Teacher	0.6

The staffing arrangement highlights not only the core teaching positions, but illustrates the role that teacher leaders and specialists play in supporting student learning. Table 4 shows that the school has 19.9 core teacher positions for 545 students in grades six through eight for an average class size of 27.4 students. Class sizes at Redland are larger on average than the 25-to-1 ratio recommended in the EB model.

Core teachers provide instruction in the areas of English, language arts, math, science, and social studies. Redland has seven content specialists who serve as both department heads and classroom teachers (they teach one less period than their colleagues). Content specialists have several roles including working with teachers to implement instructional programs and conducting informal and formal observations of teachers to provide them with feedback and coaching. Redland also has three team leaders (one for each grade-level) who coordinate the grade-level instructional program, analyze grade-level and student performance data to monitor progress towards reaching school improvement goals, and serve as classroom teachers.

A standard formula for determining the number of elective teachers, for a school with a seven-period schedule with teachers providing instruction for five periods, is to have the number of elective teachers equal to 40 percent of the number of core teachers, which would equal 7.96 positions for this school ( $0.4 \times 19.9$ ). The total at Redland is 7.5 FTE, which is just below what is needed to support its seven-period schedule.

The school has several teachers who provide instruction and support to special education students and to other students requiring extra support. There are self-contained special education classes that include 10 to 12 students. The school offers inclusion classes with co-teachers and paraprofessionals. A mixed-grade resource class is available for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP). There are two teachers (0.8 FTE total) who work in the school's Alt 1 classes, which are targeted for students with behavior issues.

There is one reading specialist at Redland who works with teachers to integrate reading strategies into their course instruction. Additionally, the reading specialist helps teachers plan lessons, co-teaches, and provides some small group instruction. The math focus teacher supports the school's algebra courses. Specifically, she works with a group of 17 students from all four sections of algebra who require support strengthening or mastering the pre-requisite skills necessary in the course (such as solving one- and-two step equations and operations with integers). She also teaches a compacted math course for advanced grades four and five students who come to Redland for the class. Compacted instruction provides these students with accelerated math courses that condense the content (the content of six marking periods is condensed into four marking periods).

There is one fully designated<sup>3</sup> LEP teacher for the school's 51 LEP students. Students classified at LEP levels 1 and 2 receive a double period of LEP instruction. Students in LEP levels 3 to 5 receive one period of instruction. These courses are offered instead of a traditional English/language arts course and as such focus on developing students skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For example, students learn about text structure, practice writing essays, and conducting research.

The English language teacher development coach currently co-teaches reading and math and provides some professional development for teachers. The school's staff development teacher is in charge of providing professional development for teachers. In addition, she teaches a math course (she is math certified) and provides additional instructional support to teachers. As one person framed it, "[She] is modeling what she is teaching to the staff. Practicing what she is preaching."

Redland has two counselors who are charged with providing counseling services, running student groups, providing case management of students with a 504 plan, and referrals to other services and support. Additionally, the school has a speech pathologist, one nurse, and one health room tech (both of whom are not paid out of the school's budget).

### *School Goals*

The school's goals over the past four to five years (approximately 2009-2014) have been geared towards closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. Redland administrators and staff have implemented numerous interventions, programs, and supports to help boost the achievement of minority students. These interventions are expanded upon in a later section, but broadly have included behavior and school climate initiatives (e.g. Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports), extended learning opportunities, and using programs such as Read 180 to support struggling readers.

The school's [goal](#) for the 2014-15 school year is to "increase the percentage of students on the honor roll to reflect the demographics of our student body." In other words, to increase the number of minority students making honor roll each quarter. Redland's school goals and school improvement plan are developed using root cause analysis, which as one staff member said, is a "very tedious process [where you] go through and ask questions to drill down and see where it is that your students need to be shored up."

The principal leads the development of school goals and improvement plans with the support of the school's leadership team.<sup>4</sup> The root cause analysis process begins with identifying trends in

---

<sup>3</sup> The ELL content specialist provides .26 FTE support, so is not included as being fully designated as an ELL teacher.

<sup>4</sup> The school leadership team includes content specialists, team leaders, an administrative secretary, a media specialist, a data assistant, an AEIST (Accelerated Enriched Instruction Support Teacher), a reading specialist, and elected faculty and staff representatives.

the data. Next the school leadership team decides how to achieve a goal or address the issues identified in the data. Finally, the plan is presented to staff members, who are able to provide feedback and input.

The use of root cause analysis began about six years ago (approximately 2008) and was a process advocated by the district. Redland's method and process of root cause analysis was developed and refined under the former principal. Emphasis is placed on separating factors school staff can and cannot control and focusing on the areas that they can control. "The process forced staff to stop focusing on blaming outside causes for student failure...we don't spend time complaining about things that we can't control...shift has become what can we do?" Poverty was cited as an example of something that school staff cannot control.

The former principal helped drive changes to the school improvement plan (SIP). Over time, it became a much more focused document. As the former principal said:

"The turning point for me [was] looking around our media center and there were all these huge posters [with] 75-80 different action steps and looking at all the red and yellow dots – things that weren't in place. One of the parents was joking with me [and said], 'I don't know how you manage all of this.' But she was right, we didn't."

As a result, the leadership team began the SIP process by identifying a group of students who needed the most support, and developing strategies that could not only benefit these students, but the whole school. For example, the implementation of [Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports](#) (PBIS) to improve the school climate provided students with set of consistent expectations around behavior, and teachers with common language to use when teaching these expectations. Additionally, focus was placed on improving instruction/improving performance in one or two subjects. In the words of the former principal, "We would start early...looking at the data, what are the root causes.... vetting data over and over again to dwindle it down. Really taking the SIP process and refining it every year, going from a very broad (almost feel good kind of thing) and taking it down and naming kids and naming groups."

The 2014-15 school improvement plan reflects this focus on refinement and use of root cause analysis. Data from the root cause analysis conducted for the 2013-14 school year led to a focus on academic language, "particularly [in] writing. All students participate in social media, but that writing is not what you need to be successful," noted one teacher. Redland's SIP states that "our students need daily opportunities to acquire and apply academic language strategies, which lead to effective and authentic communication through writing." School staff and administrators say that professional development is also aligned with the SIP.

One mechanism the school uses to achieve this goal is through an increased focus on academic language. Another is to use collaborative teacher time to discuss student data and specific students. A third is to hold student town hall meetings every quarter in order to solicit student

perspectives on the school's progress – in other words, to keep students engaged in their own learning.

### *School Schedule*

The instructional day is six hours and 45 minutes, running from 7:55 a.m. to 2:40 p.m. The length of the lunch period is 30 minutes. All in all, students receive five hours and 55 minutes of instruction daily. Teachers teach five periods and have two periods for planning, professional development, or team meetings.

Redland has seven 45- to 49-minute periods and one 20-minute advisory period. The advisory period consists of activities designed to develop student's social skills, organizational skills, and to help forge bonds with teachers.

### *Curriculum and Instructional Program*

#### **Reading**

Teachers use a curriculum that was developed by the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). It appears that the reading curriculum has not been updated for some time as one participant characterized it as “old as the hills.” Many teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the alignment between the curriculum and the resources provided to deliver the lessons. For example, one teacher commented that they must use Google Chrome to access some of the content and found Google Chrome “very difficult” to navigate. Another stated that they use the Language of Literature book, but that the majority of the questions in the textbook “are too simple and only require one skill at a time.” Finally, one teacher said that the curriculum did not provide enough suggestions on how to differentiate instruction and that the curriculum “caters more to advanced classes than on-level kids.”

Students are grouped into classes based on ability level: advanced, on-level, and inclusion students. Two reading remediation courses are offered to students at risk of academic failure across all three grades.

Redland uses the Read 180 program to support students who are “really struggling readers.” Read 180 utilizes three main components: 1) whole group instruction, 2) three station-rotations consisting of instructional technology, independent reading, and small group, and 3) whole group instruction (5-10 minutes). Some of the skills that Read 180 emphasizes are how to make meaning from text and writing strategies (e.g. thesis and claim statements). One teacher described the role of the program as part of a concerted effort to “identify struggling readers and implement strategies to help them.” The course is offered as a double period.

A developmental reading course ([Reading REWARDS](#)) is offered to special education students and focuses on improving decoding and writing skills. Students are placed into the course based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and assessment data. Reading REWARDS is a

commercial program designed for struggling adolescent readers and includes several components. Redland uses REWARDS Intermediate to provide direct instruction on decoding strategies and REWARDS Writing to provide direct instruction on sentence writing and revising. There is also a software program, Reading Assistant, which is used to give students practice with independent oral reading.

## **Math**

Redland uses the math curriculum developed by MCPS. The district is still working on aligning its math curriculum with the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards (MCCRS). However, several MCCRS aligned math courses have already been rolled out. These include Algebra I and Math 6. The primary math courses offered are: Math 6 (grade six), Investigations in Math (grade seven), and Algebra 1 (grade eight). The school also offers a course in Pre-Algebra and Honors Geometry.

The new math curriculum (Curriculum 2.0) is designed to focus on conceptual learning and problem solving and allow students to drive more of their own learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator who helps students think critically about how to solve problems. In other words, there is less skill-and-drill and more application of math concepts to solve problems. As noted in a presentation to parents on the shift to Curriculum 2.0, “the emphasis is no longer on the procedure... It’s about the thinking. Students should be thinking ‘How do I get the answer?’”

Redland has implemented several strategies to support the transition to Curriculum 2.0, particularly in algebra. First, there is an Algebra Support Club every Wednesday for an hour after-school that provides students with instruction on topics that have proven challenging (based on teacher feedback). Second, algebra courses use a co-teaching model to facilitate individual feedback and instruction to students. Third, students can receive help from teachers during lunchtime. Finally, the advisory period can be used to provide students with support for completing their algebra work.

No commercial math programs are used in the school either for general instruction or intervention purposes. However, the Algebra I course utilizes CK 12 Flexbooks that are open-content web-based textbooks aligned to course units. These Flexbooks provide students with additional support in understanding the content.

## **Science**

Redland offers the grade-level science courses designed by the district. Grade six students take Investigations in Science 6, which is a combination of chemistry and earth science. For example, students learn about matter and its interactions or about human impacts on the environment. Grade seven take Investigations in Science 7 and solve scientific problems in the areas of biochemistry, genetics, and others. Students in grade eight take a course in early space systems. Everything is problem and project based.

Science courses utilize the Prentice Hall Science Explorer books along with other materials. As one teacher noted, “We follow the curriculum to a T.”

### **Advanced Instruction**

Students are offered advanced courses across the content areas. The school offers Advanced English, Honors Geometry, Advanced Algebra, Advanced World Languages, Advanced World Studies, Advanced U.S. History, Advanced Orchestra, and Advanced Band. Placement in advanced courses is determined by several factors including student data (grades, standardized test scores), teacher recommendations, parent recommendations, and student initiation/interest.

### *Assessments*

In the 2014-15 school year, MCPS made the transition from the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) to the Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) tests. The PARCC is a summative assessment conducted in two parts: 1) the Performance Based Assessment, which focuses on skill application and 2) the End-of-Year Assessment, which focuses on comprehension and understanding. Staff framed state assessments as useful for providing a big picture view of student performance.

Redland uses MAP-R (Measures of Academic Performance of Reading) and MAP-M (Measures of Academic Performance of Math) – which are computer-based assessments administered to all grade three through eight students in the district – to help guide instruction. These assessments were framed as “developmental” since they track student growth over the course of the school year. MAP assessments must be administered at least twice per year (in the fall and spring) and schools are given the option to administer these tests in the winter as well. MAP-R scores are used to group students by reading ability and to help teachers select books appropriate for a student’s reading level. These data are also used to identify which students could benefit from small group instruction led by paraprofessionals.

At the start of each quarter, teachers administer pre-assessments to determine students’ skill levels in specific areas such as writing. These pre-assessments are developed by MCPS and Redland teachers. The pre-assessment tests are used to understand what students know at the beginning of the quarter and to support teachers’ planning and instruction. Pre-assessments are also used to determine which students might benefit from additional help from support teachers such as the reading or math specialist. Students often take the same pre-assessment at the end of the quarter to gauge progress.

Teachers develop their own formative assessments that are aligned to the curriculum and that build toward the content that is covered on the district’s end of semester summative assessments. Additionally, the district has formative assessments that take the form of mid-semester exams.

Finally, teachers use “checking for understanding” to informally assess how well students understand a lesson. For example, teachers will stop for a break midway through class and ask

students to quickly rate their understanding of the lesson or give a one-question quiz. While this is not an assessment per se, teachers have found it useful to monitor students as their lessons are being delivered. Additionally, these data help teachers adapt instruction and figure out how to present information in a way that the students will understand.

### *Interventions and Supports*

The school's principal indicated that some students require support to meet basic educational needs. As he noted, "We have students that don't come with paper and pencils and the district doesn't provide it, so it comes out of teachers' pockets." Some parents donate paper, pencils, hand sanitizer, paper towels, and other supplies. The school participated in a free breakfast pilot program in April and May 2015 and the principal is hopeful that the program will continue into the 2015-2016 school year.

Redland has multiple interventions for students at risk of academic failure and for those who require additional support. Several interventions target students who are struggling in the areas of math and English/language arts (based on grades and assessment data). Additional interventions target LEP students, special education students, and students with behavioral concerns.

Interventions for students who are struggling academically include the following:

1. Extended day programs are offered after-school from October to March, and provide one hour of instruction in math and reading. The program is targeted to students based on math and English needs. As a result of having these students in a targeted program, teachers across the content areas discuss these students and their needs during collaborative meetings and reach out to provide them with extra help. There are two sections with about 40-50 students and two teachers.
2. After-school tutoring is available for students "who are really low" and are in need of extra support to complete their schoolwork. These students receive two hours of after-school instruction provided by the principal and teachers.
3. Teachers make themselves available to students before- and after-school and during the lunch hour. As one teacher said, "Now it's a way of life that you call in a kid for lunch if he's struggling. Teachers will be here early in the morning or after-school to provide help."
4. Reading specialist who supports teachers to integrate reading strategies into their course instruction. The math focus teacher supports the school's algebra courses. Specifically, she works with a group of 17 students from all four sections of algebra who require support strengthening or mastering the pre-requisite skills necessary in the course (such as solving one- and two-step equations and operations with integers). This work is all done as push-in rather than pull-out.

5. Saturday school is also available for students who are not performing on grade-level and is provided at an off-site location. The George B. Thomas Sr. Saturday School provides tutoring and mentoring in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Classes are held from 8:30 to 11 a.m. from September through May. It is marketed as providing an “extra day of instruction.” However, one teacher noted that the program is underutilized and that only about 15 Redland students participate in the program.
6. Summer school is also available, but students must pay a fee to participate. Financial assistance is available.

There is a daily 20-minute advisory period that gives students “an opportunity to meet in small groups with one of their teachers.” Redland uses the advisory period as an informal intervention. The majority of the school’s teachers are charged with teaching one advisory group. The focus of the advisory period is not static, rather it was described as “a way to get the discipline lessons out, positive climate messages out that we wanted to get, study hall...study skills, PARCC readiness...read quietly, do homework. [It] gives kids time to spend extra time working [and] getting help with a teacher.” It can also be the site of mini-interventions. One teacher noted that the advisory period once “served as a Band-Aid” to help with issues that had been identified with student performance in reading. It may still serve that purpose given that the school’s course bulletin frames the program as time for “re-teaching or re-assessing” students. Moreover, it serves as a place where students can build a relationship and bond with a teacher.

There is an underlying push to get LEP students enrolled in extended day, after-school tutoring, summer school, and Saturday school. LEP students who have lower levels of English language proficiency receive a double period of instruction. The school uses the Sheltered Immersion Observation Protocol (SIOP), which is a method of instruction that focuses on language development and content. In other words, students are expected to meet both a content objective and a language objective.

Special education students are taught either in the classroom through an inclusion model or assigned to self-contained classes depending on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). For the inclusion model, the general education and special education teacher co-teach. Self-contained classes have around 10 to 12 students and some students have a designated paraprofessional. Special education students receive reading and math interventions, such as developmental reading. Additionally, there is a mixed-grades resource class that serves as a pull-out for special education students who are in the mainstream general education program but require small group instruction in specific content areas such as math.

Finally, the school has an Alt 1 program for students with behavioral issues and other challenges or “who might be on their way to [an] alternative two school.” Alt 1 offers a small class of four to five students and provides students with mentorship and one-on-one help. It is not easy to get into Alt 1, as one staff member noted, a student has “to be failing or have a huge behavior issue that must be documented” and evidence needs to be provided that interventions have been

attempted in the classroom for a couple of months before a student is enrolled in the class. Exiting Alt 1 is based on improvements in grades and behavior. If additional support is needed, students are considered for placement in an alternative school (MCPS call these Alt II and III programs).

### *Collaborative Teams and Professional Development*

#### **Collaborative Teams**

Teachers at Redland teach five of the seven periods. One free period is devoted to planning and the other is devoted to professional development and collaborative work. Here is the weekly schedule for collaborative teams and professional learning:

- Monday – professional development
- Tuesday – grade-level team meetings
- Wednesday – collaborative planning
- Thursday – grade-level team meetings
- Friday – collaborative planning

Grade-level team meetings are held twice per week. One of these days is spent on professional issues and the second on “kid talk” or discussions about the performance of specific students on formative assessments, MAP-R, or other assessments. There has been some discussion of focusing team meetings on departments rather than grade-levels, but the school is too small for that structure to work. Instead department meetings are held once a month after-school.

Collaborative planning time was instituted with the goal of having many of the content teachers meet to plan together for consistency across the board. As enrollment has decreased and the school has gotten smaller, trying to find collaborative planning time has become more difficult. One staff member noted, “It gets really tricky.”

#### **Professional Development**

Redland has one staff development teacher who provides professional development (PD) for teachers. The district created these positions in 2000 and when the staff development teacher first began. “No one knew what to do,” according to one teacher. Teachers had varying opinions about the professional development offered at Redland. Some teachers expressed waning enthusiasm for the initiative:

“Looking back, those first meetings were very good, all together, learning how we could all grade consistently. It’s evolved to a point where people really don’t want to go to it every Monday. We’ve had three or four different staff development teachers and some were turned off by one and it kind of bled off onto the other one. Might not like [it], but you gotta do them.”

While others described increased buy-in for weekly PD:

“[The] expectation that we meet every week for professional learning was not something [new staff] were accustomed to. This year there is a lot more buy-in and people are learning things that they can implement... People have come to the realization that you are going to meet on Mondays and you’re going to have things to do.

The structure of professional development has changed from year to year. During the 2013-14 school year, “everyone learned about the same thing and met every week...[but] the kids didn’t want to do the strategy because all teachers were doing the same thing...so we shifted to learning multiple strategies.” For the 2014-15 school year teachers learn strategies during one PD session, have a week off to plan, a week off to implement, and then meet to reflect on what happened.

Moreover, the content of PD changes to align with the goals articulated in the SIP. In 2014-15, content was focused on strategies to help students acquire academic language. The professional development progression is planned out for the whole year and includes different objectives for instructional leaders (e.g. content specialists) and teachers. For example, in September 2014 members of the instructional leadership team developed a definition of academic language at Redland. In October through December 2014, teachers created a mastery level language objective. The date that these tasks are accomplished is recorded as is the number of teachers who meet the specified PD goal.

### *School Culture and Leadership*

When the former principal assumed leadership of Redland the school’s climate and culture was in complete disarray, “Early on in school year 2007-08 [there were] over 1,200 office referrals [and] 160 out of school suspensions.” As a result, instruction was negatively impacted. Teachers did not have time to focus on student engagement in the learning and higher-level thinking because they “were playing whack-a-mole with behavior issues.”

The principal’s first major initiative was to improve the school climate. As mentioned earlier, PBIS was implemented. PBIS is a behavioral intervention model used to enhance students’ academic and social behavior. A number of half-days were also set aside for staff, parents, and students to “work on what they saw Redland becoming.” PBIS rewarded students for good behavior and helped teachers learn strategies such as purposeful teaching, modeling behavior, using the same language, and engaging parents and students in the discussion.

The principal and school leadership team focused on defining roles in the building, “what does the teacher have the authority to do” and providing strategies for teachers to implement when students acted out. The former principal noted that teachers were trained that “If this happens, don’t send the kid out. Here are steps you can take proactively. Everything was reactive. But how can you structure your classroom?” A behavioral matrix was also developed that specified what was expected and emphasis was placed on developing an understanding of why certain things were happening and how they could be addressed. The school’s leadership team created a circle of respect – yourself, others, school – for students to adhere to and instituted student town

halls to learn about student perspectives on the school. Students were asked what they were seeing in class, in the halls, and what they thought about instruction. Redland also hosts an honor roll celebration every quarter and acknowledges exceptional students with the Top Dog award.

One challenge facing the school is building a stronger understanding of student culture and background and integrating this knowledge into instruction. A recent Study Circle, a MCPS program that aims to “identify, examine and eliminate institutional barriers to African American and Latino student achievement,” revealed that Latino and LEP students believed “that their teachers didn’t care about them.” One teacher expressed confusion at this sentiment and asked, “Are we sitting in the same school building? Can we work in a different way to connect and engage our students?” Another teacher noted that they did not “know if our teachers understand the differences in cultures – not purposefully – school is very color blind. Don’t see the difference that each kid brings to the table. Everybody is working super, super hard, [I] just don’t know if they’re working smart.”

The school’s leadership recently changed. As noted earlier, the current principal is in his second year at Redland. One teacher felt very optimistic about the new leadership, “We have new blood this year, so there’s new hope.”

### *Summary*

Between 2007 and 2012, Redland saw large gains in student achievement on the MSA, particularly for low-income students. During this time period the percent of low-income students scoring proficient or above increased 24 percentage points. Interviews with staff members and the current and former principals point to several factors that have contributed to these increases in student achievement:

1. Data-driven school improvement initiatives. Root cause analysis is used to determine school goals and set the focus for School Improvement Plans (SIP). The process allows the school leadership team to “drill down” and set targeted and achievable goals that focus on specific groups of students for the benefit of the whole school. In the words of one teacher, “What is good for one is good for all.”
2. Focus on school climate. Several initiatives have been implemented to foster a positive school climate. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) provides students with rewards for positive behavior but also facilitates the creation of school-wide expectations and the use of a common language. Student town halls are held every quarter so that school staff and leadership can hear student perspectives on what is happening at the school. Students are also rewarded for strong academic performance via honor roll celebrations and the “Top Dog” award.
3. Multiple interventions. The school has multiple academic interventions such as after-school tutoring, Saturday school, and extended day programs. An advisory period is used

to foster relationship-building between teachers and students and to deliver small group instruction. Behavioral interventions include the Alt 1 classroom for students with behavior and other challenges and the school-wide PBIS program that sets expectations and provides incentives for positive student behavior.

4. Teacher support and professional development. Teachers meet for collaborative planning twice a week and for team meetings twice a week. Professional development is held every Monday. Teachers' professional development is led by the staff development teacher and English language teacher development coach, and focuses on providing strategies for implementing instructional practices aligned with the school improvement plan.

### *Alignment with the EB Model*

Many of the strategies implemented by Redland Middle School to boost student performance are aligned with the EB model. First, the school uses a root cause analysis to develop its annual school improvement plans, which relies on the examination of several data sources to get a deeper picture of student performance.

The school's instructional leadership team often engages in data-based decision making. Data from the MAP-R and MAP-M assessments are used to drive instructional improvements. Importantly, staff put a "face to the data" by identifying students who were in multiple subgroups and prioritizing those students for support. Student placement in intervention is also determined by data – certain students are targeted for after-school tutoring.

Professional development is offered on a regular basis and led by the staff development teacher. PL is structured to follow a specific learning progression with set learning targets and demonstration of teacher understanding. The school does not have any instructional coaches per se, but rather leans on the staff development teacher and content specialists to provide support and coaching to teachers.

Multiple interventions have been implemented to support students at risk of academic failure. The school has academic interventions such as extended day, after-school tutoring, Saturday school, and Read 180 for struggling readers.

Finally, several elements of school's staffing structure exceed what is recommended in the EB model, including the number of school administrators and instructional coaches. However, staffing falls short in the area of electives. Redland has 7.5 FTE elective teachers, which falls just below the 7.96 FTE recommended by the model.

Taken together, Redland has leveraged several strategies to spur improvements in student achievement and continues to work towards ensuring that all students succeed. At the end of the day, their success rests on the participation of the entire school community. As the former principal said, "If we hadn't purposefully engaged our staff, parents, and students to keep

everyone on the same page we would not have been able to go where we went. Everyone had a piece in creating it and we could call on them to support it while we were moving.”