

Orono High School

Orono Public School District, Long Lake, Minnesota

Location type: Suburban

District enrollment: 2,803 students

School enrollment: 933 students


Percentage of students at school eligible for free and reduced price meals: 7

Key Takeaways

Orono High School, part of the Orono School District in Minnesota, took the OECD Test for Schools for the first time during the 2013-2014 school year. The school's assessment results demonstrated a need to focus on critical thinking and students' deep reading skills.

Actions Taken

In response to its results, Orono took a variety of actions to address these areas for improvement.

-  First, Orono created capacity in its administrative and teacher leaders to integrate critical thinking, promote deep reading, and raise academic standards.
 - Following the 2014-2015 administration of the OECD Test for Schools, teachers now have more opportunities to review assessment results. Teachers who represent the different content areas have copies of the assessment results and share them in their department meetings. Building goals will be formalized in consideration of student performance on the OECD Test for Schools and on other standardized measures, such as the ACT, AP tests, and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments.
 - To support student achievement in critical reading and critical thinking, Orono has assigned an English teacher to gain and share expertise in lesson design and in the selection of instructional materials. The school is considering assigning a social studies teacher to support and expand that effort.
 - Teaching practices have evolved to incorporate literacy standards that apply to each content area. To support the development of students' critical thinking and literacy skills, teachers have included critical questioning practices and more meaningful writing and speaking assignments in the classroom.
 - Each department reviews the literacy standards that affect the students taking their classes and select additional readings so that students are exposed to different types of reading, data interpretation, and primary source evaluation. A training was held for teachers regarding the use of various databases that feature a large variety of reading selections. With building goals focused on literacy and critical thinking, Orono expects that these actions will promote collaboration among teachers, allowing for each teacher to share his or her successful experiences and knowledge about these domains.
- Professional development activities include workshops for teachers on critical thinking and literacy. PLCs read articles relating to both topics and develop a common understanding of them and articulate the definitions associated with them. The leadership at Orono believes that a common vocabulary, derived from teachers' perspectives, will serve as a springboard for the development or enhancement of purposeful units and lessons.
 - Teacher evaluators have learned how to identify the "look fors" associated with deeper learning and how to provide feedback and models to staff as they progress through the evaluation process.
-  In addition to learning more about critical thinking and literacy, Orono intends to assess its school and classroom environments relative to the use of instructional technology. Surveys relating to this have been, and will continue to be, administered through Brightbytes so that the school is able to monitor and adjust its progress frequently. The Brightbytes framework provides additional baseline data about how instructional technology supports effective teaching practices aligned with 21st century learning standards.
-  Additionally, a team of teacher and administrative leaders has focused on determining best practices for providing personalized academic and intellectual challenge for all students along with developing teaching practices, curricular models, and support systems that improve critical thinking skills for all

students and meet the needs of Gifted and Talented learners.

- During the 2015-2016 school year, Orono is implementing a 1:1 digital learning initiative. With laptops at the ready, students have greater flexibility with their learning so that it becomes a more personalized experience for each of them.
- The 1:1 initiative has supported greater critical thinking and deep reading in the classroom by allowing teachers to disseminate to students a variety of readings and other source material.
- An additional period, Spartan Hour, has been added to the school day. Spartan Hour occurs each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. During this time, students are able to access their teachers for extra assistance with their learning so they can experience classroom success. This additional period also provides meeting times so that academic clubs can meet. Students are able to choose from a variety of groups to pursue their interests. Some of the clubs include Book Club, Science Team, Math Team, Debate, Poetry Club, Robotics Lab, and Solar Boat. Spartan Hour also provides opportunities for students and teachers to develop positive relationships outside the typical classroom environment. In October 2015, the school will survey students and teachers to find out more about how Spartan Hour and other aspects of the school operation affect relationships in the building.



Finally, Orono has engaged its K-12 literacy leadership team in reflecting on how its work at the secondary and elementary levels aligns with the principles of PISA and Orono's baseline data. This literacy team has facilitated professional development sessions with all content area teachers that focus on integrating deep reading strategies across the curriculum and has worked with social studies colleagues on developing integrated strategies and content reading.



Orono High School participated in the November 2014 Global Learning Network webinar that summarized an analysis conducted by the American Institutes for Research which showed the "big picture" of OECD Test for Schools results in the United States. Orono was also represented at the 2014 Convening of World-Leading Schools where representatives engaged with peers and learned about best practices.

Orono saw impressive improvement in its reading performance when it took the OECD Test for Schools again during the 2014-2015 school year. The number of deep and wide readers increased by 11 percent, while the number of students performing below level 2 in reading decreased by 5 percent and the students performing at levels 5 and 6 increased by 5 percent. Teacher-student relations also improved significantly. The proportion of students agreeing with statements about positive teacher-student relations rose on every question, and the number of students agreeing with "Most of my teachers treat me fairly" rose 9 percent and is currently at 97 percent.

Those wishing to learn more about the practices at Orono High School may contact Aaron Ruhland, Director of Learning and Accountability, at aruhland@orono.k12.mn.us and David Benson, Principal, at dbenson@orono.k12.mn.us.