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THEY ARE ALL OUR KIDS

How Collective Efficacy Transformed One Elementary School

CASE STUDY

Reimagining Teacher Leadership

The Academy at Middle Fork

Appalachian State University
Walkertown, North Carolina

This case study was developed with special insights from the staff at the Academy at Middle Fork.



This case study was co-produced as a special collaboration between Empower Schools and Teacher-Powered Schools.

Teacher-Powered Schools (TPS) is a project of the nonprofit organization Education Evolving. We believe school educators, those working closest to students, should co-design and make decisions impacting student success. Teacher-powered schools use shared leadership models to reimagine educator roles and create rigorous, relevant, student-centered learning environments. Our TPS team works directly with school and district teams through workshops, expert resources, and school partnerships facilitated by our TPS coaches who have been leaders at their own teacher-powered schools. We coach teams on shifting mindsets, establishing technical skills, and using proven practices to build the capacity of all teachers to be leaders without leaving the classroom. This model improves outcomes for students and educators. We engage districts, authorizers, unions, teacher prep providers, and policymakers to sustain K–12 systems where educators and students thrive. For more information, visit teacherpowered.org.

Empower Schools is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization operating throughout the United States. Empower works with state agencies, policymakers, public school districts, institutions of higher education, and in partnership with communities across the United States in service of millions of students. Empower improves outcomes for urban and rural communities by developing sustainable systemic solutions at the school, district, and state levels.

Empower was founded in 2013 on the belief that partnering with communities to empower educators would lead to greater student success at school and in life. We support community partners in designing, launching, and sustaining innovative schools and school systems that help students achieve long-term economic mobility. Empower works at the systems level to propose, develop, and transform state legislation and public policy, build community support, nurture systems-level leaders, and provide equitable K–12 and post-secondary opportunities for all students. Empower's responsive approach is flexible and focused on the unique context and needs of each school community. For more information, visit empowerschools.org.

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Ways to Use this Case Study

Like a Short Story

Read all sections in order and consider the narrative of the teachers and community.

Like a Resource Bank

Bookmark this study to reference the interactive resources found throughout.

Like a Launchpad

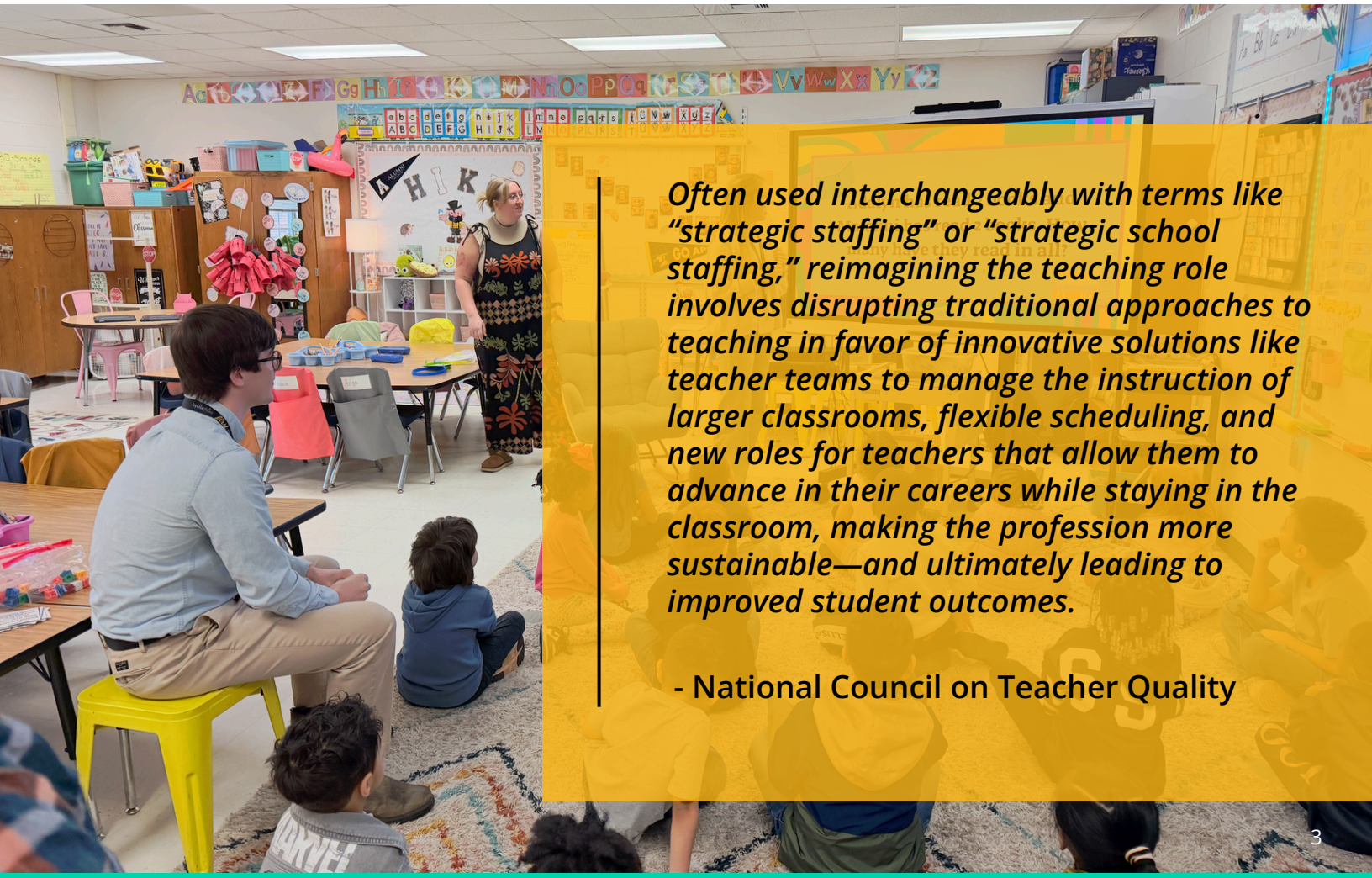
Use the learnings found in this study to support your Professional Learning Community (PLC) and develop a plan for your school's reimagining.

More to Learn

Go beyond reading to apply study takeaways to your learning community.

Bright Ideas
Tips and interactive resources you can click to dive deeper

Get In Touch
To get support implementing reimagining, reach out to us at empowerschools.org/contact



Often used interchangeably with terms like "strategic staffing" or "strategic school staffing," reimagining the teaching role involves disrupting traditional approaches to teaching in favor of innovative solutions like teacher teams to manage the instruction of larger classrooms, flexible scheduling, and new roles for teachers that allow them to advance in their careers while staying in the classroom, making the profession more sustainable—and ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

- National Council on Teacher Quality

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

Reimagining in Practice

Breakthrough **Instructional Teaming Practices**

Modeled after Arizona State University's Next Education Workforce, the Academy uses grade banding, specialist integration in Learning Lab, and co-teaching to deliver strong grade-level instruction, targeted reteaching, and individualized intervention through MTSS.

Students attend five days, including a special Friday schedule with personalized learning, community partner-led projects, and student-driven project-based learning. Teachers begin Fridays with intervention, then plan in vertical and horizontal teams.

Teachers participate in school-level decisions through committees, distributed leadership, and democratic processes.

Reimagining in Policy

University-Supported Lab Schools

- North Carolina's University System Lab School Law, passed in 2016, supports better outcomes in districts with low-performing schools through the state university system, including educator and administrator training.
- UNC System lab schools serve at least three contiguous grades in K–8 and districts where at least 25% of public schools were classified as low-performing, with a focus on students who are low-performing or attended a low-performing school.

Evidence of Impact

Improving Outcomes for Every Learner

North Carolina's lab schools serve students at schools rated D or F on the state dashboard. Since 2022, the Academy has improved outcomes for all students, including Black, Hispanic, English Learner, and economically disadvantaged students.



84.3

Growth index



23.7% → 43.9%

Reading achievement

21.3% → 45.5%

Math achievement

96%

of teachers say the school is a good place to work and learn

NCDPI Performance Dashboard 2025–26.

HOW TO REIMAGINE

The Teacher Role

How Innovation Unlocks Teacher Power

District public schools can be Innovation Schools – places where teachers, students, and community stakeholders are sustainably empowered to create the best school for the local community while preparing students to thrive academically, personally, and in their future careers.

To enable Reimagining in Practice that offer teachers fulfilling careers in schools that are great places for both students and educators, education leaders should work to ensure:

Space for Innovation

Broad flexibility to enact change is key, and this flexibility should be clearly defined and allow for continuous improvement

Aligned Policy and Resources

Districts, state education agencies, and other stakeholders create space for innovation and enable flexibility in how teachers work together, interact with students, and act as leaders

Sustainability for Successful Efforts

School districts and other stakeholders should ensure that successful remaginings can continue as long as they are meeting ambitious goals

Shared Accountability

Innovative reimagining of the role of the teacher is a powerful tool but must work in service of improved outcomes

Enabling Conditions

States, education agencies, and school boards have varying policies that enable reimagining throughout the country.

Read more about enabling conditions and protections that exists here.

Types of Innovation Schools

Learning communities can decide to take on innovation for a variety of reasons. Those reasons shape the type of reimaginings that would be most critical and effective.

Turnaround Schools

Designed to dramatically improve performance.

Pathways Schools

Designed to give students unique exploration and training opportunities in specialized fields.

Innovative Model Schools

Designed to implement a coherent school model, whether time-tested (e.g., dual language, Montessori, IB) or newly designed

Community Schools

Designed to act as a hub and meet holistic student and family needs.

COLLECTIVE EFFICACY IN ACTION

School redesign began with a belief.

At the Academy at Middle Fork, an App State lab school serving 330 K–5 students near Winston-Salem, school redesign began with a belief. The school operates on the conviction that, as John Hattie's research affirms, collective teacher efficacy is among the most powerful influences on student achievement: when educators believe in their shared ability to make a difference, student outcomes improve.

By reimagining the traditional one-teacher, one-classroom model in favor of grade-span teams who co-plan, co-teach, co-assess, and co-reflect, the Academy has built a culture in which every child belongs to every educator and no teacher carries the work alone. Their redesign work was done collaboratively creating co-ownership over their new instructional model and teaming structures. The co-design process naturally led to a shared leadership model that creates leadership opportunities from the classroom for teachers ensuring that the best teachers are not pulled into administrative roles and still provides teachers with meaningful professional growth.

Distributed leadership, protected collaboration time, and a foundation of relational trust turn their belief into design and ultimately implementation. The result is a school where staff report less stress and greater purpose, students ask for a longer school day, and proficiency has climbed to its highest levels yet. At the Academy, collective efficacy has created a school where teachers and students thrive.

> **“ When a community comes together and says, ‘this work in this building is for all of us… and we believe collectively that it will produce positive results for children,’ it can happen.**
>
> **DR. AMIE SNOW, PRINCIPAL**

> **“ These children are dearly loved by every adult in this building… It’s not like this is just Miss Cruz’s kids. They are the entire school’s kids.**
>
> **MEGAN GARNER, ART TEACHER**

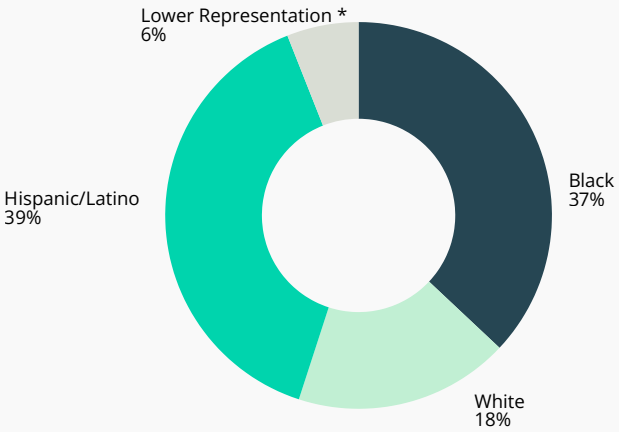


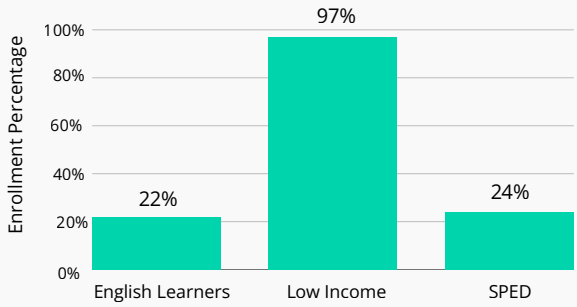
ABOUT ACADEMY AT MIDDLE FORK

Campus Demograhics | School Year 2025-2026

Student Demographics

Race and Ethnicity





Title 1 School: Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) School

Special Populations

300 K-12 students

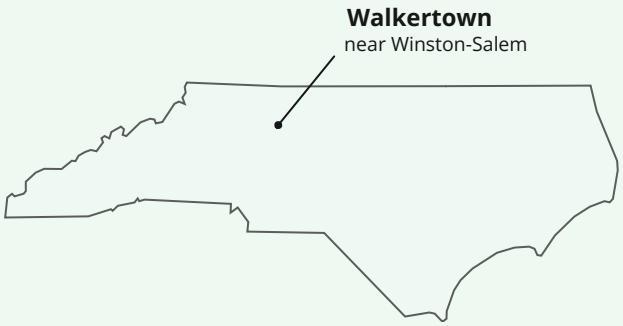
83% of AMF students identify as people of color.

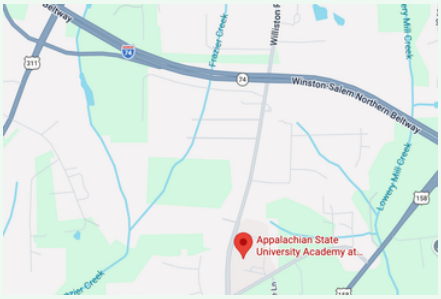
To learn more about AMF see their school profile.

*Lower Representation includes individuals who identify with 2 or more races or as "Other."

Exploring the Context

The Academy at Middle Fork is an App State lab school in Walkertown, near Winston-Salem, North Carolina.





View the map to virtually explore about the AMF Community.

STRONG TIER 1 INSTRUCTION

Through Teaming and Co-Teaching

Teaming and co-teaching are the delivery mechanism for strong core instruction at the Academy. Their innovative Friday schedule creates a weekly long block of collaborative planning for educators, which improves the quality of instruction, and weekly data protocols ensure reteaching is responsive with flexible small groupings for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. To strengthen learning outcomes, the Academy has adopted high-quality instructional materials designed to support rigorous, grade-level learning in literacy and STEM education.

Within each grade-banded team, teachers co-teach with their shared students and de-silo the traditional structure of schooling. Educators benefit by learning from other educators' styles and approaches, leaning on each other's strengths, troubleshooting in real time, as well as having a team to share the mental, emotional, and physical load of teaching. Students benefit by building strong relationships with multiple adults, experiencing different instructional strategies, and having collaboration modeled for them daily.



Learning Lab

Learning Lab is a time during the school day where specialists and classroom teachers co-teach social studies and science standards, bringing their subject expertise in music, art, STEM, media, and PE into core content. Specialists choose which grade bands to partner with by quarter based on what students are studying. This has led to specialists, so often isolated in schools, being fully integrated at the Academy into instruction and planning.

In addition to academics, the school has invested in restorative practices and behavioral supports to help students succeed socially and emotionally. The school's literacy, STEM, and experiential learning approach supports students to become more collaborative, willing to take academic risks, and more connected to the learning process.

> **"If I don't understand it one way, there may be someone else who can help in another way.**
>
> **ACADEMY STUDENT**

> **"You have to have strong teachers; you have to have teachers who understand the need for Tier 1 instruction and how to be a good teacher.**
>
> **BRENT MACROW, K–1 GRADE TEACHER**

LEARNING LAB IN PRACTICE



K–1 | History Museum of Change Over Time

Kindergarten students on the K–1 team created their own History Museum of Change Over Time to demonstrate their understanding of a North Carolina history standard. Students designed and built models of telephones, computers, televisions, and cars to illustrate how these inventions have evolved over time. Using recycled materials and collaborating with both STEM teachers and the grade-span teaching team, students showcased how innovation has improved everyday products while explaining their learning to authentic audiences.

2–3 | A Mural of Shared Values

On the 2–3 grade span, students explored how governments and communities work together to support the shared values and needs of their citizens. To deepen their understanding, they partnered with the art teacher to create a collaborative mural representing the Academy community and the values that unite the school. This project allowed students to connect civics, creativity, and community identity in a meaningful and lasting way.

4–5 | A Journey Through the Human Body

The 4–5 grade span brought science to life by creating an interactive Magic School Bus Journey Through the Human Body. Students researched each body system and designed large-scale, immersive models using recycled and collected materials. The PE teacher joined this project to help students learn about how their bodies move and work as they built and designed each station. Visitors traveled through the different body systems while students served as guides, explaining how each system functions and how they work together to keep the human body healthy. This authentic exhibition combined scientific inquiry, engineering, creativity, and student leadership.

A 3-Year K–1 Readiness Class

In 2025, the Academy team noticed through screening assessments that many kindergarteners were behind academically, socially, and emotionally and were unlikely to thrive in a traditional classroom. Staff identified 15 such students and created a differentiated, special education-supported "readiness" K-1 classroom. Since most of these students were not receiving special education services, the Academy designed this early intervention classroom to offer "something different" before labeling young children and preventing premature special education referrals. Students remain part of the K-1 team, and parents understand their children might spend three years on the team rather than the traditional two. The program has proven so successful that within six months, five students had already exited into mainstream K-1 classrooms. The remaining 10 students continue to make progress with the goal of mainstreaming all of them the following school year.

DEEP DIVE

Five Reimaginings at AMF					
	1	Restructured Instructional Week	2	Shared Leadership	
3	Rigorous Learning Program	4	Teaming Model	5	University Partnership

1 Restructured Instructional Week

At Academy at Middle Fork, the schedule is built around combining grade levels into spans (K-1, 2-3, 4-5) rather than single grades. This frees teachers to group and regroup students flexibly by needs and to co-teach collectively rather than in self-contained classrooms. The educator team has implemented a shared schoolwide structure where everyone teaches math at the same time, schoolwide recess, and common Learning Lab blocks. This schedule creates the overlap needed for specialists to push into core content and for support staff to run small-group intervention all at once.

The most distinctive reimagining at The Academy is their unique use of Friday time for students and educators. Students engage in technology-assisted personalized learning, clubs, and culminating activities. A set of consistent "Friday teachers" (similar to building substitutes) work with students on activities planned by the assistant principal. Teachers have 5 hours of protected, sustained time for co-planning and data-driven Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) in addition to their regular daily planning time. This collaborative time allows teachers to build, adapt, and implement their innovative teaming model.

Student Friday Schedule

K–1	2–3	4–5
Arrival Independent reading	Arrival Independent reading	Arrival Independent reading
Morning meeting	Morning meeting	Morning meeting
Intervention block	Intervention block	Intervention block
Community or university activity	Community or university activity	Community or university activity
Reading personalized learning	Reading personalized learning	Lunch & Learn
Lunch & Learn	Recess	Reading personalized learning
Math personalized learning	Lunch & Learn	Recess
Recess	Math personalized learning	Math personalized learning
Student choice clubs	Student choice clubs	Student choice clubs
Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal

Friday activities are supported by a consistent team of "Friday teachers," with activities planned by the assistant principal.

RESTRUCTURED INSTRUCTIONAL WEEK

5 HOURS of protected, sustained time for co-planning and data-driven Professional Learning Teams (PLTs), in addition to regular daily planning time.

K–1 Team	2–3 Team	4–5 Team	Exceptional Child (SpEd) Team	Specialists	Intervention Team
Support arrival	Support arrival	Support arrival	Support arrival	Support arrival	Support arrival
Morning meeting	Morning meeting	Morning meeting	Social-emotional check-ins	Specialist PLT	Team planning
Intervention block	Intervention block	Intervention block	EC PLT	Intervention block	Team PLT
Learning Lab planning	Learning Lab planning	Learning Lab planning	Progress monitoring and prep	Learning Lab planning	4–5 intervention block
K–1 PLT	Grade level and individual planning	Grade level and individual planning	K–1 math workshop	Individual planning	2–3 intervention block
Grade level and individual planning	2–3 PLT	4–5 PLT	Team planning	Team planning	K–1 intervention block
Clubs Coach check-in	Clubs Coach check-in	Clubs Coach check-in	Clubs Coach check-in	Clubs Coach check-in	Clubs Coach check-in
Support dismissal	Support dismissal	Support dismissal	Support dismissal	Support dismissal	Support dismissal

PLT = Professional Learning Team. EC = Exceptional Children. SpEd = special education.

Planning and collaboration

Intervention and workshops

Shared school routines

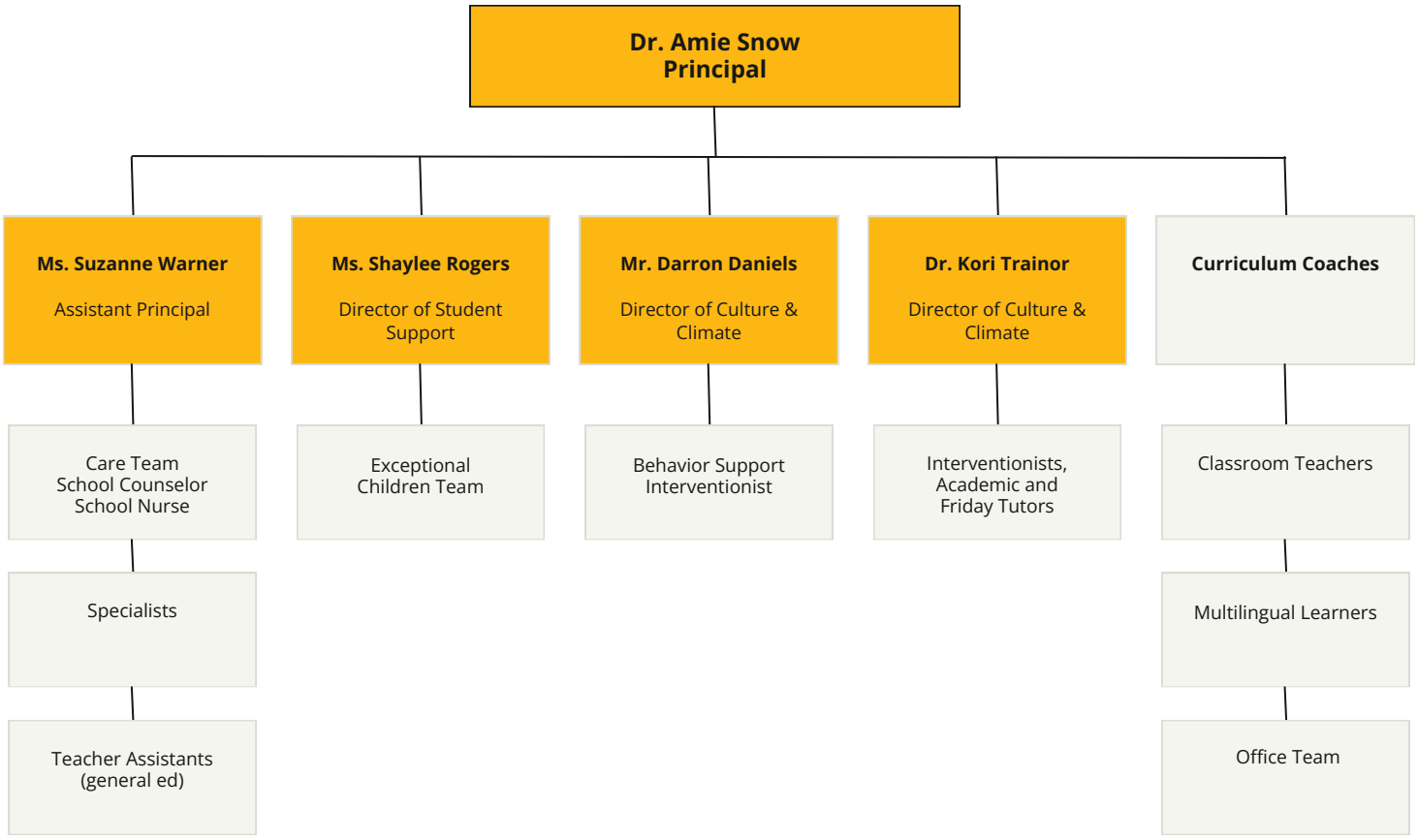
SHARED LEADERSHIP

At the Academy at Middle Fork, decision-making has shifted from a top-down, principal-dictated model to a distributed and transparent one in which teachers hold genuine authority. Based on a Teacher-Powered Schools model, Academy educators share responsibility and decision-making in areas impacting student success. Educators vote on and pilot curriculum, build their own pacing guides, and adapt instruction based on student data rather than following mandates.

School-wide direction is shaped through teacher-chosen committees (covering areas like personnel, school culture, and school improvement) that tackle real structural questions.

The Academy's leadership structure and weekly leadership and PLC meetings bring decisions to the educators closest to students. Curriculum coaches act as connectors who carry data findings into grade-span conversations rather than simply receiving data reports. Transparency is a key lever to make this system work. Leaders open budget meetings to any staff member, agendas and notes are shared, and administrators foster an open-door approach, so teachers describe feeling genuinely part of the process.

Academy Leadership and Support Structure



Source: Academy at Middle Fork organizational chart, updated August 2026.

RIGOROUS LEARNING PROGRAM

The learning program at Academy at Middle Fork pairs research-based curriculum with deep flexibility in how teachers deliver it, treating materials as a resource rather than a script so educators can adapt lessons to real-time student data. Instruction is anchored in strong grade-level Tier 1 teaching. The team deliberately re-strengthened their Tier 1 instruction after recognizing that interventions had begun to overshadow students' access to core content. A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) frames every student as somewhere within the framework, with daily intervention blocks, small-group reading and math workshops, and reteaching driven by frequent formative and benchmark data examined in weekly PLCs.

Specialists extend the learning program through Learning Lab, integrating art, music, PE, and other expertise into science and social studies so students explore standards through multiple modalities and hands-on, exploratory projects. Personalized learning software (currently IXL) supplements core instruction on Fridays, and the whole program is grounded in restorative practices and relationship-building that support the whole child. This strategy is working; in 2026, the school had the highest-ever proficiency gains while keeping students feeling engaged, known, and eager to be there.

> **“ We learn things using different types of strategies… It’s always a new way to learn.**
>
> **FIFTH-GRADE STUDENT**

The Academy’s Instructional Model

LEARNER-CENTERED

Collective Efficacy

Doing what’s best for kids
Embrace vulnerability
Celebrate progress

Mastery-Based Learning

Individualized student paths
Student self-assessment
Reteaching and realistic timelines

Authentic Inquiry

Problem-based learning
Student-led learning and teacher facilitating
Peer support model
Skill portfolios

Student Agency

Personalized learning plans
Student choice of activity and assessment
Students’ ownership of learning

TEACHER-CENTERED

Co-Planning

Every two weeks with EC, ML, and specialists

Co-Instructing

Parallel teaching and transparent feedback

Self + Co-Assessing

Inclusive, standards-aligned, research-based experiences; equitable assessments; consistent review of MC

School Culture

Pathways and opportunities for lifelong learning and positive community impact through innovative learning experiences for all students

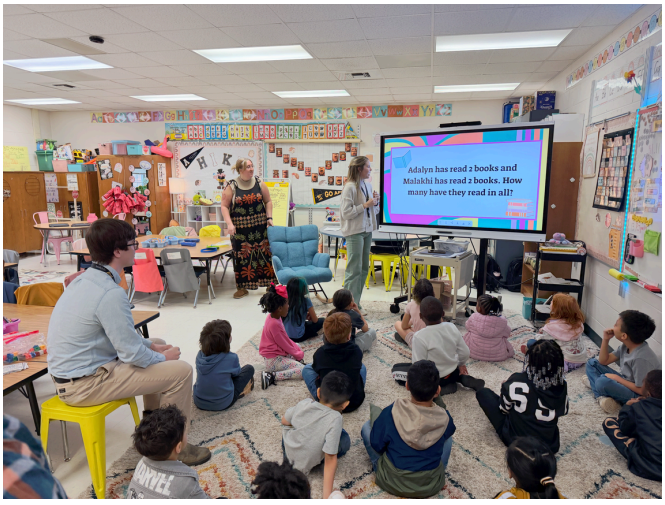
EC = Exceptional Children; ML = multilingual learners. Source: Academy at Middle Fork instructional model.

TEAMING MODEL

The Academy at Middle Fork team visited ASU's Next Education Workforce in 2021 and was inspired by the teaming they observed and the Next Education Workforce model. They came back and created a similar approach based on their community's unique needs and assets. They chose grade bands to gain more flexibility to co-teach and share all students collectively rather than working in isolated, single-grade classrooms.

Students belong to the whole team, not one homeroom, allowing them to be grouped and regrouped fluidly and to draw on each teacher's particular strengths. Teams plan together constantly, often informally and daily, turning everyday collaboration into "mini-PDs" and distributing the cognitive load so no teacher carries everything alone; specialists and exceptional-children teachers (special education teachers) are folded into these teams as full partners through co-teaching and Learning Lab rather than operating as siloed "lone rangers."

Smaller teams are favored over large grade levels because they function more effectively, and the model's success hinges less on structure than on human conditions such as aligned personalities, vulnerability, and trust. School teachers and administrators repeatedly named personality meshing as the hardest and most essential element, and why the school leans on restorative practices, explicit team norms, and intentional hiring to keep teams cohesive.



Advice for Schools Starting Teaming

Reimagining educator roles and innovating with school schedules and instructional models is full of expected and unexpected challenges. The Academy team shared that one challenge that surprised them was not technical, but human. A veteran teacher shared that aligning personalities was "probably the most important part of this model" and "the hardest part". They noted that co-planning difficulty stems less from finding collaborative planning time than from meshing people and creating effective teams. Several educators advised other schools to consider potential conflicts before pairing teachers. Strong teams complement each other not only in their instructional skill sets and interests, but also in their leadership styles, approaches to conflict, and how well they get along.

Grade-Span Example

100 students | 9:1

Curriculum Coach	**Teachers 1–4**
Interventionist	**Tutor**
Teacher Assistant	**Student Teacher**

Additional support: EC Teacher and ML Teacher

Example grade-span staffing configuration.

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Another important part of the Academy's successful reimagining of teacher roles and schooling comes from their deep partnership with Appalachian State University (App State). Lab schools exist to question, disrupt, and reimagine schooling, and the university has supported the Academy at every step in redefining what it means to lead as educators and improve learning for students.

App State has been a valuable partner from the design of the school, through implementation, and now as they focus on continuous improvement. By taking on a role similar to a central office, the university provides the Academy with access to highly qualified research, coaches, and professional development. Educators, administrators, and families all reported the partnership with App State as a key factor in the school's innovations and success.



While lab schools receive federal, state, and local funding like other public schools and are held to the same accountability models, they also have access to funding through the university. The Appalachian State University Foundation and UNC system funding resources can be used in more flexible ways than traditional public funding streams, allowing the Academy to pilot new initiatives, support professional learning, strengthen university-school partnerships, and invest in innovative practices that align with their mission.

> **"What's incredible is that we have a lot of faculty... who care strongly about education and educator prep, but now they get to play a part in the creation of a school, right? And what this looks like from the ground up... especially our elementary ed program and our literacy and math faculty had a huge part in that.**
>
> **EMMA HATFIELD-SIDDEN**
> **Director of Clinical Education,**
> **App State's Reich College of Education**

Learn more about App State's lab schools at appstate.edu/lab-schools.

HOW POLICY ENABLED THESE REIMAGININGS

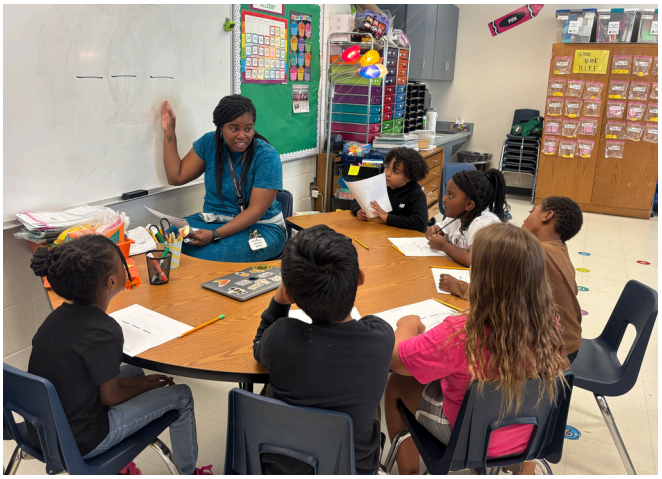
North Carolina's University System Lab School Law

North Carolina legislation provides lab schools with governance and operational flexibility. The university partner acts similarly to a central office and takes on responsibilities such as professional development, curriculum support, and art and music programming. Teachers and administrators are hired by the university and are considered university employees. As such, they participate in the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System.

Under the legislation, approximately 80% of students enrolled at lab schools must come from populations classified as "underperforming." Lab schools receive the same state and federal funding streams as traditional public schools and remain subject to state accountability measures, including end-of-grade testing. They are not charter schools, and have their own category under the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Lab schools are also time limited and are not designed to be permanent.

The legislation specifically envisions lab schools as places where universities can use their resources to support innovative instruction and educator preparation. It creates a pathway to redefine and strengthen university and K-12 public school partnerships, as well as provide high-quality teacher and administrator preparation training through evidence-based teaching strategies and university coaching support. This has allowed the Academy to create learning experiences that look different from those in many traditional district schools.

The law also grants autonomy over areas such as school calendars, instructional programming, staffing structures, policies, and curriculum. (North Carolina General Statutes § 116-239.8). At the Academy at Middle Fork, they have leveraged those flexibilities in several ways. Some of their most significant innovations include strategic staffing models, co-teaching structures, collaborative planning, and expanded partnerships with university faculty, programs, and preservice educators. (Appalachian State University Academy at Middle Fork, 2026)



Flexibility with Accountability

Lab schools have autonomy over calendars, instructional programming, staffing structures, policies, and curriculum.

They receive public funding and remain subject to state accountability measures, including end-of-grade testing.

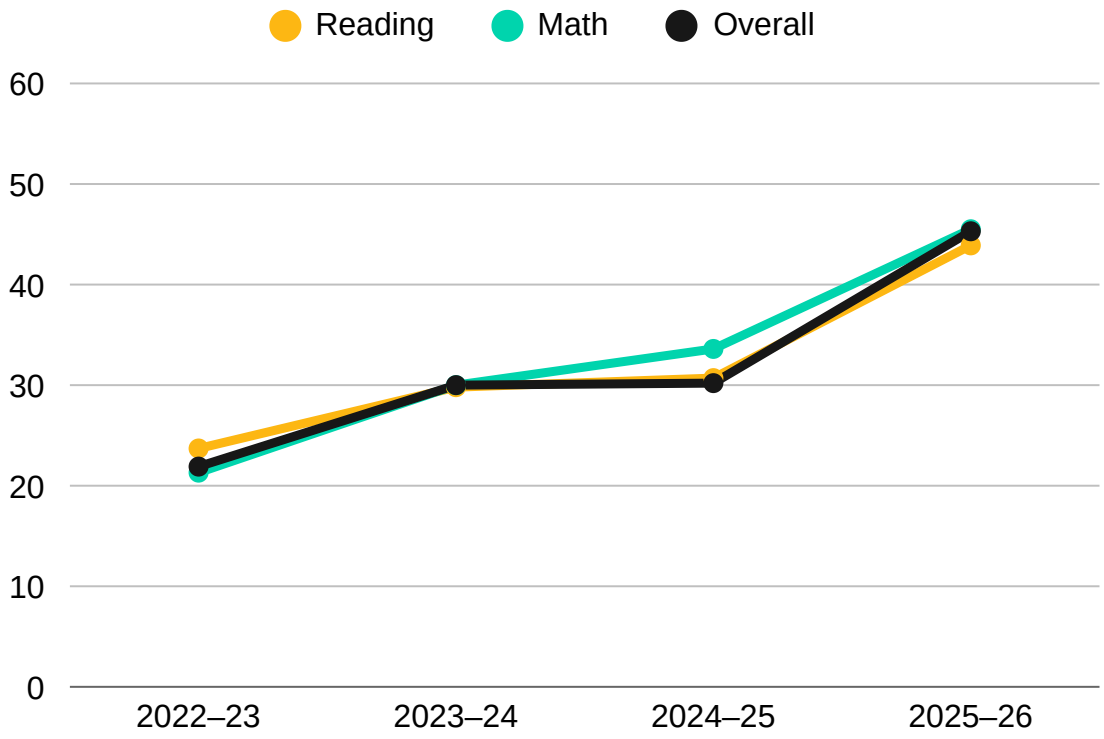
North Carolina General Statutes § 116-239.8. Appalachian State University Academy at Middle Fork, 2026.

PROMISING RESULTS

Student Outcomes

Implementation science tells us that changes take 3 to 5 years to see meaningful results. The Academy began their redesign in 2022, and last spring saw their biggest gains in student growth with a growth index score of 84.3. Their data also indicates 5 year highs for Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, and a 2 year high for English language learners. Educators at the Academy attribute their growth in math and reading directly to the collaborative teaming model.

2022–2026 Achievement



84.3

GROWTH INDEX

+20.2 PTS

Reading, 2022–26

+24.2 PTS

Math, 2022–26

Overall achievement: 21.9% → 30.0% → 30.2% → 45.3%

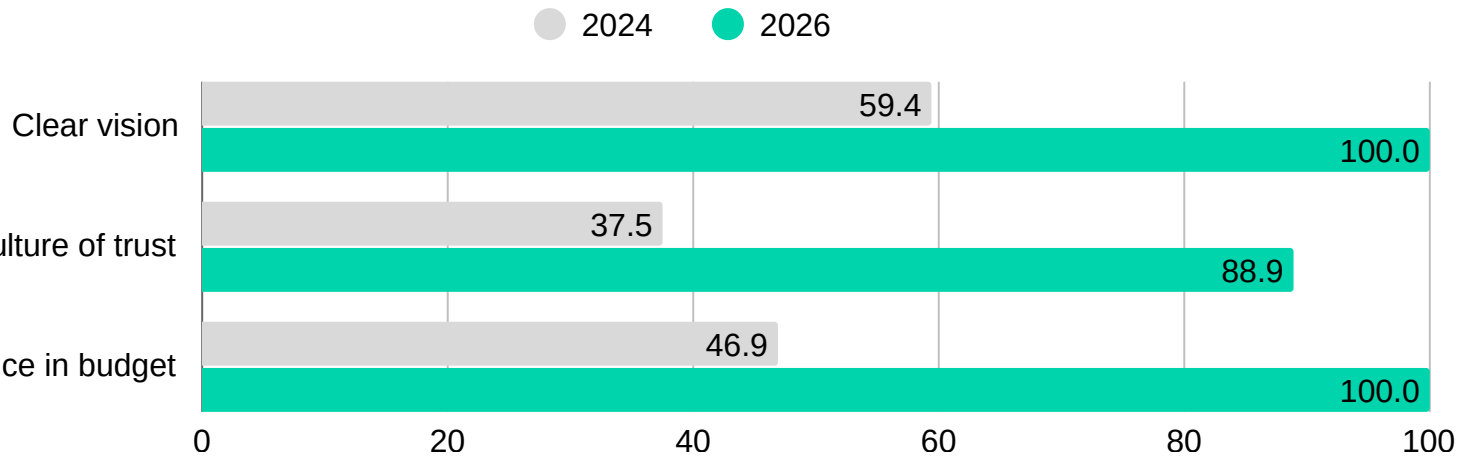
Achievement Across Student Groups | 2025–26

Student group	Score	Trend	Recent high
All Students	45	1-year upward	5-year high
Black	41	4-year upward	5-year high
Hispanic/Latino of any race	45	1-year upward	5-year high
Economically disadvantaged	43	4-year upward	5-year high
English Learners	39	1-year upward	2-year high

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Performance Dashboard. Achievement score is 80% of the school grade. Groups with fewer than 30 students are not reported.

TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHER OUTCOMES

The Academy saw impressive gains in teachers' experience of their working conditions. North Carolina administers their Teacher Working Conditions survey every two years. Teachers are asked questions on a variety of topics including retention, school leadership, teacher leadership, professional learning and support, instructional practices and support, and time. The Academy showed growth in all domains and the strong data corroborates their anecdotal evidence of collaborative professional culture.



North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

Survey statement	2024	2026
School leadership communicates a clear vision	59.4%	100%
School leadership helps teachers improve instruction	68.8%	100%
School leadership set clear and actionable goals for improving student learning	59.4%	100%
School leadership creates a culture of trust in the building	37.5%	88.9%
The majority of teachers assist in determining school budget	46.9%	100%
The majority of teachers assist in determining professional development	56.3%	100%
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students	68.8%	92.6%
Professional development enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet diverse student learning needs	87.5%	96.3%
As a result of the evaluation process, I have made positive changes to my classroom practice	62.5%	95.7%
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	53.1%	88.9%
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students	65.6%	96.3%

Source: North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Academy respondents: 27 in 2024 and 27 in 2026.

LEADING TO MEANINGFUL OUTCOMES

For Students and Educators

1 Students get what they need from multiple teachers

Flexible grouping and shared ownership mean a student who struggles with one teacher's approach can be supported by another's strengths; students know exactly where they are in their learning, take pride in their growth, and rarely "fall through the cracks" as they would in a once-or-twice-a-year regrouping system.

2 Revised master schedule

Reimagining school schedules for students and educators lead to maximized teaching and learning in addition to expanding instructional blocks for individualized and small group instruction. Teachers have protected collaborative planning time for unit and lesson internalization, data review, and reflection.

3 Strong sense of belonging and safety

Students report wanting a longer school day. This is a community that lives out the core values of App State's lab school: Honesty, Integrity, Kindness and Excellence (HIKE) which support a positive school culture and behavior support system.

4 Invested in new reading and math curriculum

The Academy adopted and implemented Expeditionary Learning (EL Education), and enVision Math. Both HQIM curricula are targeted to meet the specific and conceptual skills that students need to develop mastery of reading and math standards.

5 Reduced teacher stress and isolation

Educators report less stress, lighter take-home workload, and shared ownership ("it's a tag-team effort"); specialists especially feel less like "lone rangers" and connected to colleagues through co-planning and Learning Lab.

6 Meaningful professional growth and retention pathways

Teachers gain leadership opportunities from the classroom, professional collective autonomy, coaching, and tuition-supported advancement from App State. Distributed leadership builds capacity of multiple educators that makes the school sustainable beyond any single leader.

> **“ Our kids' favorite thing about school wasn't recess and lunch... When they shared what was one thing about school that you'd change, they wanted it to be longer. They want an extra hour a day.**
>
> **DR. AMIE SNOW, PRINCIPAL**

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Questions and activities to practice and apply the reimaginings found in this study.

Find flexibility in state law

- Investigate if your state has policy for lab schools, innovation zones, or other opportunities for site-level flexibility, including chartering.
- If there isn't a state policy, some districts and unions create opportunities for site-level flexibilities through MOUs, pilot programs, or waivers.
- What opportunities exist at the district or site level that create flexibility to support reimagined teacher roles and innovative schedules to better meet student needs?

Create a teaming model that works for your school

- Be clear what problem you are solving for when considering teaming. What goals do you have for students and educators in terms of teaming?
- Learn about multiple teaming models, visit schools, talk to teams, build a collective understanding of the elements of teaming that are most important to your school.
- Use human-centered design thinking frameworks. Ask "what if" questions, prototype, test, and iterate. Allow teams to be creative, try things, and fail forward.
- Ensure teachers have access to rigorous grade-level curriculum and aligned professional learning to equip teachers to meet all students' academic needs.
- Consider personalities as well as areas of expertise and passion when creating teams. Educators on the same team need to have strong professional relationships and genuinely like working together. Prioritize culture building activities throughout the year.

Empower educators to design, make decisions, and adapt

- Create time for design, reflection, and feedback. Some teams use subs to create release time for teacher teams, others do summer design retreats, still others (like the Academy at Middle Fork) create time with an innovative schedule.
- Build transparent systems: document norms, communication responsibilities, and purviews of each committee.
- Agree on a collaborative decision-making protocol and use it consistently.


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