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Poised for change, willing to make substantive school improvements

Spring Lake Park High School one of four schools selected to help with state's Systemic High School Redesign initiative

Spring Lake Park High School is one of only four Minnesota schools selected to help redesign the state's high schools.

The school was awarded a grant by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to help create a model group of high schools committed to significant redesign resulting in increased student engagement and academic achievement.

Redesigning high schools is of national and statewide interest, and has the backing of government and business leaders.

Spring Lake Park High School, which serves students from Blaine, Spring Lake Park, and Fridley, had to prove that it was "poised for change" and "willing to implement substantive school improvements" with support from MDE over a three-year period.

Grant-winners Spring Lake Park, along with Fridley, Delano, and Long Prairie, will gather, analyze and utilize multiple sources of data; develop strong effective, change-orientated leadership; and implement results-based programs and strategies.

The programs and strategies will address the five core outcomes of the Systemic High School Redesign: Building a Minnesota Model initiative which are:

- rigorous and relevant courses for all students, especially at transition points
- personalized learning environment for each student, with support of parents and other adult mentors
- multiple pathways to post-secondary training or college to achieve a minimum K-14 education
- high quality teacher and principal leadership
- student assessment and program evaluation data used to continuously improve school climate, organization, management, curricula and instruction

According to principal Frank Herman, eight Spring Lake Park High School staff members were trained on data and program analysis in February.

Rigorous planning took place in March, and a detailed project was developed for the school.

The Spring Lake Park team elected to target students who had two or more failures in their first trimester.

The following are part of the intervention plan developed for each student:

- an adult mentor
- weekly meeting with a counselor
- tutoring services offered

- a student mentor
- parents contacted weekly
- self assessment
- chemical pre-assessment
- pre- and post-survey

Herman said he and his staff are optimistic and excited about attaining "the lofty goal" of having no failures for 90 percent of the identified student for the third trimester this year.

Dr Jeff Ronneberg, District 16's assistant superintendent said: "This initiative is consistent with the district's Strategic Directions and its vision for the future, and it should provide the high school staff with a great deal of support to accomplish their stated priorities."

Consultants from the MDE are working alongside Spring Lake Park staff on this three-year project.

What is learned along the way will be shared with other Minnesota school districts.

"Hopefully, the work we're doing as a result of the MDE grant will not only significantly help our own students, but eventually all students throughout the state," said Herman. "We're in this together."