

# Ramping Up in Rural Schools



## Tackling Diverse Student Needs in East Grand Forks Public Schools

A small rural farming community known for its annual fishing tournaments and farmers markets, East Grand Forks sits just across the state line from North Dakota in the northeast corner of Minnesota. Like many rural communities, its population seems rather homogenous on the surface—comprised mostly of working class, White families. East Grand Forks, however, is one of many Minnesota counties experiencing an influx of refugee resettlements. The state ranks 13<sup>th</sup> nationally for the number of refugees who have resettled within its borders. In the last year, thousands of refugees have settled in the state from countries that include Somalia, Iran, Iraq, and El Salvador.

For East Grand Forks Public Schools—a small school district serving about 1,900 students across four schools—this growing community of immigrants and refugees brought new challenges as they sought to better serve and support its children and families. Working closely with local governing entities, the district identified coordinated programs and services to help bridge the gaps experienced by families from various cultures and ethnicities.

Realizing that these students faced different academic and non-academic barriers than their predominantly White peers, they knew that they also needed to find ways to help their school staff identify and remove the barriers keeping the students from succeeding. They also wanted to help staff better connect and build relationships with students and families from a growing diversity of countries, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds.

*“We didn’t have anybody in the district who spoke the common language of our students’ families, resulting in communication barriers between the district, schools, students, and families.”*

**Suraya Driscoll**, Director of Teaching and Learning, East Grand Forks Public Schools

## Community Profile

**9%**  
English Learner<sup>1</sup>

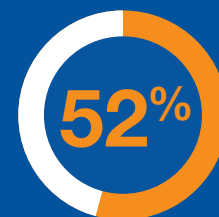
**16%**  
Special Education<sup>1</sup>

**34%**  
Free/Reduced  
Price Meals<sup>1</sup>

**55%**  
of citizens are  
without post-  
secondary degrees <sup>2</sup>

## Academic Performance<sup>1</sup>

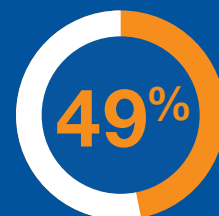
On average, only 51% of students are meeting standards in math, reading, and science.



Math



Reading



Science

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Report Card. 2020. Minnesota Report Card. [online] Available at: <[https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/orgId--10595000000\\_\\_groupType--district\\_\\_p--3](https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/orgId--10595000000__groupType--district__p--3)> [Accessed 9 April 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Worldpopulationreview.com. 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/east-grand-forks-mn-population/>> [Accessed 9 April 2020].

## A Personal Touch to Professional Development

Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all approach, Communities In Schools® partnered with the school district to identify ways to leverage resources and relationships with local organizations. Before any training was delivered, a district assessment was conducted to better understand the East Grand Forks community, socioeconomic issues, and existing support systems. These findings were integrated into the RampUp for Student Success course modules to ensure that school staff were trained on relevant and practical solutions that could be easily implemented. RampUp for Student Success facilitators were also selected to best match the needs of the East Grand Forks community, with backgrounds ranging from current Communities In Schools® program directors to public school administrators.

Together, they led East Grand Forks district administrators and educators through in-person trainings and online coursework that empowered school teams to build their own integrated supports solutions for their campuses. Courses were delivered to leaders from across the district including administrators, counseling teams, a literacy specialist, and a bilingual cultural liaison.

East Grand Forks administrators began applying their learnings from the courses immediately. In addition to RampUp for Student Success facilitators providing implementation support after the completion of each course, the district also hired an Achievement and Integration Coordinator to oversee their efforts to deliver integrated student supports across the district.

Though they are still in the early stages of implementation, results are already coming to bear as they are beginning to see the fruits of improved communication between staff, students, and families. According to a recently released survey of high school students, significantly more students feel connected to the school community and that they have someone they can talk to. Today, the district is decidedly more confident in its ability to address the diverse needs of its student body.

## Partnership Overview:

### ◆ District Needs:

East Grand Forks selected Communities In Schools® as its partner to help them address new challenges of serving a small but growing immigrant and refugee community.

### ◆ Description of Services:

Through the RampUp for Student Success professional development series, school staff received hands-on training tailored to specific district needs and implementation support as they began to use the tools and coursework.

RampUp for Student Success has helped East Grand Forks Public Schools adopt a systematic, whole-child approach to support its students, with accountability and transparency at the core.

### ◆ Course Topics:

- ◆ Assessing School Needs and Creating a Strategic Plan
- ◆ Implementing Integrated Student Supports for the Individual
- ◆ Forming and Managing Effective Community Partnerships
- ◆ Using Data to Identify and Track Non-Academic Needs

### ◆ Funding Sources:

Minnesota Department of Education: Achievement and Integration Program

## School Leader Perspective: Solidifying Our Team



### Chad Grassel

Assistant Principal,  
New Heights Elementary  
East Grand Forks  
Public Schools

We were always working as a team, but RampUp for Student Success really solidified our ability to respond to a wider range of academic and non-academic student needs.

As an example, we recently had a student in need of special education services who was in the care of a guardian without the legal custody needed to make decisions on the student's behalf. In order to connect this student to the services he needed, our referral team—which consisted of our school principal, teacher, social worker, and myself—partnered with social services to obtain the required signature

from the student's legal incarcerated parent and helped ensure the students' guardian could be granted legal custody.

RampUp for Student Success had a significant impact on our ability to strengthen our referral process and create greater accountability for supporting students in ways that we may not have previously been able to. After the training, everything clicked into place and we were able to work together much more efficiently and quickly to connect students to the supports and services they need.