

2014 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT

Robert Kern, Jr., Principal

Nazareth Area Middle School

610-759-3350

rkern@nazarethasd.org

Nazareth, Pennsylvania

Nazareth Area School District

Superintendent Dr. Dennis Riker

driker@nazarethasd.org

The State of Pennsylvania had placed Nazareth Area Middle School (NAMS) on warning for low performance, and the middle school building was undergoing a major physical transformation when Robert Kern, Jr. took on the role of principal. Mr. Kern was deeply involved in the physical construction of the middle school and helped guide the design in keeping with the middle school program he envisioned implementing. His continuous communication with fellow administrators, board members, and staff, created an atmosphere of trust from the beginning. He also held student assemblies to explain his vision of the new school and reinvigorated the PTA through monthly meetings where parents could ask and

hear firsthand what was happening in the building.

Guided by an approach that relies on the expertise of others, Kern assembled a team of veteran teachers and specialists to analyze student data, design and implement a parent, student, and staff survey, and develop an improvement plan. This plan addressed four key areas: a) finding time for effective remediation, 2) streamlining the process of identifying students' academic needs, 3) developing remediation programs and a monitoring process, and 4) changing the school culture and environment. Kern and his team identified a 35-minute period, known as ExCEL—Excellence: a Commitment to Every Learner—of daily remediation and acceleration activities. They developed a data analysis wall and SMART goal process that occurs every eight weeks throughout the school year, and implemented a formal Response to Intervention program, with a formal RtI coordinator, with progress monitoring and remediation/acceleration as needed. Every student's progress is tracked through an individualized system.

Other changes included a school-wide reading program to strengthen students' reading strategies (all staff, including custodians, was trained in the Reading Apprentice Model). The whole school reads the same book at the same time; the book is a focus of the ExCEL period. A summer workshop program, based on five major curricular strands (mathematics, science, English, world languages, social studies), keeps students academically engaged over the break. In addition to the focus on the five major curricular strands, students also gain exposure to exploratory classes in physical education, fitness, health, computer technology, music, drama, technology education, art, family consumer sciences, digital citizenship and careers of potential interest. NAMS houses a fitness center, an all-weather track, a natatorium, and an auxiliary gym. Students design personal fitness plans before moving on to high school.

Today, NAMS has virtually erased the achievement gap for students from disadvantaged students and is closing other gaps for English learners and students with special needs. Ongoing supports for students include a study skills group, a social skills group, and other guidance programs for students in need. An anti-bullying (including cyber-bullying) program reaches both victims and offenders through technology, group and individual sessions, and parental involvement. The guidance department also holds evening parent sessions to explore many adolescent topics. A Best Buddies Club creates bonds between special needs students and regular education students (who must formally apply), and a Talon Club recognizes students who are outstanding role models based on good work habits, good citizenship qualities, school spirit, positive attitude, and characteristics that exhibit a caring person. Mr. Kern leads the end-of-the year award assembly that recognizes students for academic achievement and character.