FREETOWN-LAKEVILLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN
George R. Austin Intermediate School
2026 - 2028

Dr. Elizabeth Sullivan, Principal
Mrs. Kelly Steele, Student Services Director
G.R. Austin Intermediate School

Strategic Objective #1

Create an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students.

George R. Austin Intermediate School SMART Goal One:

In alignment with the district's commitment to creating an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students by establishing classroom cultures where every student feels comfortable sharing their thoughts, asking questions, and engaging in meaningful academic conversations regardless of their background, learning style, or ability level, GRAIS students and staff will work towards seeing 100% of our fourth and fifth graders demonstrate growth toward proficiency in respectful academic discourse and collaborative discussion skills, as measured by classroom observation rubrics and student self-assessments, to foster an inclusive and safe learning environment where all voices are valued and heard, as well as to prepare students for their future as students and members of society.

Critical Issues

- GRAIS students frequently struggle to express their ideas clearly in academic settings, leading to frustration and disengagement.
- Many students haven’t developed the vocabulary or frameworks necessary for academic conversations, making it difficult for them to participate meaningfully in class discussions.
- Some students dominate conversations while others remain silent, creating an imbalanced classroom.
- Fear of judgment and trying to simply fit in may prevent students from sharing their thoughts, particularly those who lack confidence in their abilities.
- Students with varying cultural backgrounds may have different communication styles that aren't being recognized or valued as they should.
- English language learners (ELLs) may hesitate to participate due to language barriers.
- Students with learning differences may struggle with the pace or format of typical discussions.
- Many students lack the foundational skills needed for collaborative learning, such as active listening, building on others' ideas, and providing constructive feedback, making group work challenging and often ineffective.
- Though we have done a lot of work in this area over the past two years, some students may not feel psychologically safe to ask questions or admit when they don't understand something.
- Children may struggle with the increased collaborative demands of middle school, high school, and eventually college and career environments where communication and teamwork are essential without solid skills in academic discourse.

Strategies / Initiatives

- Establish clear discussion norms collaboratively with students, including guidelines for respectful listening, taking turns, and building on others' ideas.
- Create visual reminders of these expectations and regularly revisit them.
- Implement structured routines like morning meetings or afternoon circles that provide consistent opportunities for academic conversations.
- Teach specific conversation skills such as how to ask clarifying questions, disagree respectfully, provide evidence for thinking, and use academic language stems.
- Model these skills through think-alouds and fishbowl discussions where students observe effective discourse in action.
- Use formats like Think-Pair-Share, literature circles, and collaborative problem-solving protocols.
- Provide sentence starters and conversation starters as we do with writing for students who need additional support, offer opportunities for written reflection before verbal sharing.
- Utilize small group settings where quieter students may feel more comfortable participating.
- Facilitate peer partnerships that pair students with complementary strengths.
- Develop clear rubrics that students can use for self-assessment.
- Hold check-ins twice a trimester where students reflect on their discussion participation, and provide feedback focused on growth rather than deficits.
- Through Thrillshare, share discussion strategies with families so they can support these skills at home, and help students see connections between classroom discussions and real-world communication.
- Integrate discussion skills into all subject areas, including special subjects that show students that respectful discourse is valuable across disciplines and context.

Benchmarks / Measures of Progress

- Use of teacher observation rubrics to measure specific behaviors like students using sentence stems for respectful disagreement ("I respectfully disagree because..."), actively listening without interrupting, building on others' ideas, and including quieter classmates in discussions.
- Use of trimester observations to show growth trends and identify students needing additional support.
- Use of student self-reflection surveys on which students rate their own listening skills, comfort level sharing ideas, and ability to disagree respectfully. Include questions about whether they feel their voice is valued and if they help others feel included.
- Tracking of speaking time during discussions to ensure all students participate meaningfully.
- Monitoring of whether students from different backgrounds, ability levels, and learning styles are contributing equally.

- Documenting times where students advocate for peers or demonstrate cultural sensitivity in their responses.
- Measuring the progression from basic turn-taking to sophisticated discourse moves like asking clarifying questions, synthesizing multiple viewpoints, and using evidence to support arguments.
- Tracking students' use of academic vocabulary and their ability to engage with complex texts through discussion rather than just individual work.
- Evaluating how well students work together in small groups, including role rotation, conflict resolution, and ensuring all members contribute.
- Measuring not only whether students can follow discussion rules, but also whether they're developing the deeper social-emotional competencies.
- Track student attendance as an indicator of students' connectivity to school.

Resources

- **Current:**
  - GRAIS Staff
  - Curriculum Leaders
  - Common Planning Time
  - Pull-out Time for Staff to Meet
  - Director of Curriculum and Assessment
  - Director of Student Services
  - Data Specialist for Aspen Reports
  - Administrative Learning Walks followed by Timely and Meaningful Feedback

- **Needed:**
  - Relevant and On-going Professional Development Opportunities

Strategic Objective #2

Provide high-quality, relevant and rigorous programs to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of all students.

George R. Austin Intermediate School SMART Goal Two:

In support the district's commitment to provide high-quality, relevant, and rigorous programs that meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students, GRAIS students and staff will work to see that there will be individual student growth toward meeting or exceeding proficiency in applying grade-level writing conventions (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar) and stamina during independent writing tasks, as measured by trimester writing assessments and writing stamina tracking logs.

Critical Issues

- Writing conventions serve as the foundation for all future academic success.
- Students who struggle with basic capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar will face increasing difficulties as they progress through upper grades, where writing demands become more complex and expectations higher.
- Without solid convention skills, students cannot effectively communicate their knowledge across all subject areas.
- Many students currently lack the ability to sustain focused writing for extended periods, which indicates deeper issues with writing confidence, topic development skills, and self-regulation, impacting their ability to complete writing tasks and participate fully in academic assessments.
- State and district assessments require students to demonstrate writing proficiency within time constraints. Students who cannot write with proper conventions or maintain focus for 20 minutes may be at a disadvantage.
- Students cannot effectively demonstrate their understanding in science, social studies, or mathematics when their writing lacks clarity due to convention errors or when they cannot sustain effort long enough to complete written explanations and responses.
- Students without a grasp on conventions and stamina will face significant challenges in meeting future writing demands.
- Without targeted intervention at the elementary level, achievement gaps in writing will likely widen.
- Students from diverse backgrounds may need additional support to master academic writing conventions.

Strategies / Initiatives

- Implement a systematic approach to teaching conventions through mini-lessons embedded in daily writing workshops.
- Create anchor charts for each grade level that display age-appropriate capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar rules.
- Use interactive editing exercises where students work in pairs to identify and correct convention errors in sample texts.
- Establish a "convention of the week" focus where teachers emphasize one specific skill across all writing activities.
- Gradually build writing endurance through structured independent writing time that increases incrementally from 10 minutes at the beginning of the year to 20+ minutes by spring.
- Create a writing stamina tracking system where students self-monitor their writing time and celebrate personal growth milestones.
- Provide choice in writing topics and formats to maintain student engagement during extended writing periods.
- Create rubrics that clearly define proficiency expectations for fourth and fifth grade conventions.
- Implement data tracking systems that allow teachers to monitor individual student progress and identify students needing additional support.
- Create peer editing partnerships where stronger writers mentor classmates.
- Provide additional practice opportunities through writing centers with targeted convention activities.
- Provide collaborative planning time for grade-level teams to align convention instruction and share effective strategies.
- Share writing goals and strategies with families through principal memos.

Benchmarks / Measures of Progress

- Trimester writing assessment scores showing improvement in writing conventions (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar).
- Writing stamina tracking logs documenting time spent on independent writing tasks.
- Pre/post comparison data from trimester assessments showing individual student growth.
- Rubric scores for each writing convention component (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar).
- Writing endurance metrics (Trimester I -target 10 minutes, Trimester II- target 15 minutes, Trimester III -target 20 minutes of writing.
- Students writing samples demonstrating growth.
- Student self-assessment data on writing confidence and stamina.
- Teacher observation checklists for writing behaviors and engagement, frequency of writing convention errors per writing sample, and fluency rates (words per minute during independent writing).

Resources

- **Current:**
  - Wonders Curriculum
  - Introductory Resources from the “Being a Writer” Program
  - iReady Assessment in Reading
  - GRAIS Staff
  - Curriculum Leaders
  - Effective Common Planning Time
  - Pull-out Time for Staff to Meet
  - Director of Curriculum and Assessment
  - Director of Student Services
  - Administrative Learning Walks followed by Timely and Meaningful Feedback

- **Needed:**
  - Relevant and On-going Professional Development Opportunities
  - Shared Research-based Articles
  - Complete “Being a Writer” Program, Materials, and Training

Strategic Objective #3

Provide human, financial, and material resources to support high-quality instruction and engaged student learning.

George R. Austin Intermediate School SMART Goal Three:

In support of the district's commitment to support high-quality instruction and engaged student learning, by June 2026, 100% of GRAIS students will demonstrate growth in the math practice of attending to precision by accurately using mathematical vocabulary, symbols, and notation in both written and verbal explanations. This will be measured, in year one, with three common math performance tasks, with students demonstrating growth toward proficiency or higher using a staff created precision rubric.

This goal will be analyzed and reassessed for the 2026-2027 school year.

Critical Issues

- As math fluency is the foundation for all higher-level mathematical concepts, students must achieve automaticity with basic facts, so they may focus their cognitive resources on more complex problem-solving and conceptual understanding, thus achieving accuracy.
- Math fluency has diminished over time and data shows gaps in particular in grade four.
- Many upper fourth and fifth elementary students struggle with grade-level mathematics due to gaps in foundational skills, particularly in fact fluency impacting problem-solving approaches and accuracy.
- Strong problem-solving skills prepare students for mathematical reasoning they'll encounter in middle school, high school, and beyond, while also developing critical thinking skills applicable across all subject areas.
- Building collaborative structures (CPT and pull-out time) where educators can share effective practices and analyze student work together is crucial for systemic improvement.
- Families as partners in math learning, especially in historically underserved communities, requires culturally responsive outreach and support.

Strategies / Initiatives

- Utilize tiered instruction that meets students at their current level while working toward grade-level standards.
- Use flexible grouping based on ongoing assessment data to ensure all students receive appropriate challenge and support.
- Establish daily math fluency practice that builds automatic recall of math facts. Incorporate number talks, mental math strategies, and systematic progression through fluency benchmarks.

- Teach consistent problem-solving strategies across all classrooms.
- Provide students with multiple problem-solving approaches and encourage mathematical discourse about their thinking.
- Continue to utilize our regular data team meetings for teachers to analyze student performance patterns, identify specific skill gaps, and plan targeted interventions.
- Incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into math instruction. Use real-world problems that connect to students' communities and provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate their mathematical thinking.
- Provide intensive, small-group instruction with the math specialist and Interventionists for students who are below grade level, particularly focusing on foundational skills while maintaining exposure to grade-level content.
- Use of both pull-out or push-in models by the math specialist.
- Share take-home resources, and communication strategies that help families support math learning at home.
- Continue to use CPT (common planning time) and math pull-out times teachers collaborate on math instruction, share successful strategies, and analyze student work together, with a focus on equity and closing gaps.

Benchmarks / Measures of Progress

- Fall, Winter, and Spring iReady, Teacher-generated Formative and Summative Assessments
    - Administer iReady three times per year (fall, winter, spring) to track growth trajectories
    - Use consistent rubrics that separate math fluency from problem-solving strategy assessment
    - Establish baseline data and set trimester growth targets toward the individual student improvement in fluency and accuracy

- Grade-Level Diagnostic Assessments
    - Pre-assessment at unit beginnings to identify skill gaps
    - Post-assessment after each major math unit to measure learning gains
    - Monthly fluency checks using timed assessments for basic operations
    - Individual student progress charts for math fact mastery with celebration for growth
    - Targeted intervention tracking for students identified as needing additional support
    - Family engagement metrics related to math support at home
    - Exit tickets and quick checks administered 2-3 times weekly
    - Peer assessment activities
    - Student self-assessment of confidence in math fluency and thus problem-solving
    - Attendance

Resources

- **Current:**
    - iReady Math Instruction and Assessment
    - Iknowit

- Math Specialist
- Math Curriculum Leader
- Interventionists
- Director of Curriculum and Assessment
- Data Specialist
- Aspen
- Director of Student Services
- ST (Spacial-Temporal) Math Program
- Administrative Learning Walks with Timely and Meaningful Feedback

- **Needed:**
  - Relevant and Ongoing Professional Learning Opportunities on Math Instruction
  - Time for Vertical Alignment of Math Instruction K -5