

Unpacking the Thriving Schools Framework:

CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

A culture of collaboration happens when teachers are given the opportunity and resources to **work together in intentional ways** throughout the school day to support **their learning and student success**.

Thriving schools are characterized by strong cultures of collaboration. A culture of collaboration shows up when the adults in a school work together around **instruction, student support, and shared responsibility for results**, with classrooms functioning as **connected parts of one team** rather than isolated silos. In practice, that includes **shared planning time, data conversations** that coordinate intervention, **coaching**, and **common goals** that align teachers around what high-quality student work looks like. It is important that these functions are **built into the school day**, to both respect teachers' time and to maximize their opportunities to learn alongside one another.

"I think a culture of collaboration is so important - I'm just a much better teacher when I collaborate with other people. If time is not set aside, it doesn't happen, or it happens on your own time, and then you're burned out."
- MNPS educator

In one MNPS school, a teacher team reviewed test scores together, identified who taught content most effectively, and had the strongest teacher work with the students struggling most — a practice that spread from ELA into other subjects and **lifted both achievement and team morale**. Collaboration also means no teacher has to figure things out alone: in another school, a second-year teacher gained predictable, content-specific support through a standing weekly meeting with the dean of instruction. This is why the condition matters: when expertise is shared instead of siloed, **students get the right help faster, teachers grow faster, and the school improves together**.

"When I can go into [another teacher's] classroom, interact with her students, watch what she's doing, and then she can come watch me — that's the best kind of professional development."
- MNPS educator



Educator perspective:

What does this condition look like in practice?

- Teachers have the opportunity to **mentor and be mentored**, with newer teachers learning alongside experienced colleagues
- Non-evaluative observations and feedback cycles help teachers and leaders share **ideas, best practices, and suggestions** for improvement
- Teachers have **protected time during the school day** for team collaboration
- Teachers work effectively **with grade-level teams and subject teams** to gain deeper insights on content and student progress
- Teams collaboratively **analyze teacher and student data** together through PLCs (professional learning communities) to **inform instructional moves** and decisions
- Adults **share responsibility for student support** rather than treating classrooms as isolated silos



How do other Thriving Schools conditions intersect with Cultures of Collaboration?

Collaboration is closely linked to the other conditions of a thriving school. **Effective leaders** carve out collaborative learning and professional development time in the master schedule and reshape adult learning around what teachers say they need. For example, one MNPS school moved from presentation-style faculty meetings to teacher-driven work on vertical alignment across grades. **Effective leaders** also empower educators to carry the work themselves: when teachers lead collaborative learning, mentor colleagues, and drive data conversations, collaboration stops depending on any one leader and becomes part of how the school works. Collaboration also fuels **Ambitious Instruction**: shared planning and data conversations lead to better coordinated intervention and instructional response, and educators consistently said that learning from a colleague down the hall — watching a lesson, being watched, comparing practices — is the most valuable professional development they receive. And collaboration both depends on and deepens an **Inclusive and Supportive School Culture**: teachers open their classrooms, ask for help, and admit what isn't working only where they feel safe and that they belong.

How do outside-of-school factors play a role?

Collaboration inside a school is also shaped by decisions made beyond it, from **district-wide trainings and cross-school convenings** to **career pathways and compensation structures**. Strong school leaders take advantage of this, working with the district, community partners, and even other schools to **make quality professional learning available** to their teachers.

Measurement and evaluation:

How do schools know what's working?

- **School culture and climate survey data** shows feedback from teachers about whether they experience meaningful collaboration, quality professional learning, and a sense of belonging among their colleagues.
- **A school's master schedule** that includes protected, recurring time for collaborative planning and professional learning is evidence that a school treats collaboration as how the work gets done, not just an extra component when time allows.
- **Team meeting artifacts**, including agendas, data protocols, and analysis of student work can show the ways in which collaboration is tied directly to instructional decisions.
- **Mentorship and peer observation participation**, in which teachers across experience levels give and receive feedback, shows that collaboration reaches everyone.
- **Teacher retention data and staff morale**, particularly positive trends over time, signal a collaborative culture in which teachers feel supported by colleagues and want to stay.
- **ELA and math proficiency and TVAAS growth** can be indicators of a strong culture of collaboration when analyzed alongside other data points — when adults share expertise and coordinate support, student learning improves.

Explore other Thriving Schools Conditions: [RESOURCE ALIGNMENT](#) | [EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP](#) | [INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE](#) | [AMBITION INSTRUCTION](#) | [ENGAGING AND RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES](#) | [THRIVING SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK](#)