

2016 Ryan Award Winner: Laura Miguez Howarth

Case Study: KIPP Academy Nashville

Nashville, TN | 364 students, grades 5-8

33% African-American | 35% Latino | 89% low-income | 11% special education

Her message was as clear as the plastic page protectors she put on each classroom door at KIPP Academy Nashville: The team would stare data in the face, confront it and make a plan to close the gap between where the students were now and where they needed to go to be college ready. Laura Miguez Howarth's first move as principal was to have every teacher give students a weekly quiz, then spotlight the results on the classroom door. With specific goals, procedures and metrics, she brought the whole team together quarterly to challenge the results up on the board.

It was difficult publicly sharing results that showed only 9 percent of students in one teacher's class passing the state test, but if they were to help the mostly minority and mostly low-income students compete, honesty was critical.

"I create transparency so I can build trust. There is no façade that this is going really well when it's not," says Ms. Miguez, as she's known around the halls of KIPP Academy Nashville. She built systems and structures and created daily, weekly and monthly trackers to force the shift to that transparency.

Despite some of the ugly early numbers, Miguez saw a path for the school, and for the teacher who had only 9 percent of students pass the test. It turned out to be a good bet, as that teacher has improved her kids' scores nine times over. *"We've made insane progress in five years in terms of individual teachers and kids,"* Miguez says.

Today, KIPP Academy Nashville is a Tennessee Reward School, a distinction given to the top 5 percent of Tennessee schools for year-over-year progress. Her first full year as principal, students posted double-digit increases on state scores,

Transformational Leaders

GET IT

Understand all the challenges and complexities of leading in a historically underperforming, under-resourced school and neighborhood.

STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING

Are goal-oriented with the ability to prioritize, while creating strong systems, structures, and processes within the school that are efficient and effective.

COMMUNICATION

Effectively communicate to a wide variety of audiences (parents, students, staff, etc.) in both verbal and written format.

INSTRUCTION

Possess a clear understanding of the learning standards and effective teaching practice.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Build trust and loyalty amongst entire staff; operate with candor and transparency; leverage their strengths and emotional intelligence.

RESILIENCE

Demonstrate persevering through challenges with a focus on the original goal.

PROFESSIONALISM

Display professionalism and maturity by meeting all deadlines and exhibiting behavior, communication, and body language that is consistently respectful and positive.

COACHABILITY

Exhibit self-awareness and openness to discuss their own strengths and weaknesses, and implement action steps that lead to growth.

CONFIDENCE

Stand up for beliefs and have the ability to make important decisions, even when unpopular; the leader's presence exudes a perfect balance of confidence and humility.



more than doubling state math and science results. (In math, the school soared from 24 percent of students proficient and advanced to 51 percent in just one year.) They've continued to drive higher.

When she took over, *"teachers who wanted to give exit tickets every day did, and people who didn't, just didn't,"* says Miguez, who started at the school as a Spanish teacher and served as dean and assistant principal before being named principal in February 2011. She brought consistency to procedures, creating rubrics and a handbook, and united people around a common mission. Dean Adrianna Clemmons says the decision to spotlight data propelled the staff in meaningful ways. *"That was probably a very powerful moment in our school history,"* she says. *"Since then, we've always shown data regardless of what it looked like and never hid from that. That's been extremely transformational for our school."*

These days, teachers hang their results voluntarily in those clear page protectors on the door, to motivate kids.

Her vision for the school is rooted in one sobering statistic: Research shows that 79 percent of students who come from families in the highest income quartile graduate from college. For those students coming from families in the lowest income quartile, that number drops to just 11 percent. Most KIPP Academy Nashville kids fall into the category that suggests only 11 percent of them will complete four years of college. To give her students the same opportunities, Miguez set the goal of making sure 79 percent of her students graduate from college. And everything works back from that. (The student-facing goal is 100 percent. Miguez says the team will increase the bar once students hit the 79 percent, but are focused on college completion, not just admission.)

To translate this number down to her middle school students, Miguez knows they will need to achieve a 21 or higher on the ACT when they are in high school. Miguez says the NWEA math assessment aligns nicely to the ACT and informs the staff where



MEET Laura Miguez Howarth

In 2008 Laura joined KIPP Academy Nashville as a founding Spanish Teacher.

*In 2009 she was selected as 7th and 8th grade team leader and invited to participate in the KIPP School Leadership Program, a six week summer institute at New York University. Upon returning to KIPP Academy Nashville Laura served as the Dean of Students for the 2010-2011 school year. In 2011 Laura took over as principal of KIPP Academy Nashville and transitioned this July to the role of Head of Schools for KIPP Nashville managing our high school, two middle schools and our talent team. Under Laura's leadership KIPP Academy Nashville has been named a Tennessee Reward school in 2013, 2014 and 2015 (*no 2016 state test) and was nominated as a State of Tennessee SCORE Prize Finalist in 2014 and 2015. KAN has also consistently outperformed both the district and the state in academic performance on the TCAP.*

Laura is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University with a B.S. in Organizational Communication, B.A. in Spanish and an M.A.T. in Spanish. During her college career Laura played Division 1 soccer, serving for three years as the captain of the team. Laura lives in East Nashville, TN with her husband Jason, her 5 year old son, Austin and 1 year old daughter, Sophia.

fifth-graders fall. Those students in the 75th to 100th percentile would be deemed college ready. *"Everything should be in service to this in our mission,"* Miguez says. *"Is this going to happen in a year? No. Is this going to happen in two to three*

years? Probably not. But in five years this could absolutely be a reality."

But here lies the challenge: Some years, as few as 5 percent of students entering the fifth grade at KIPP Academy Nashville are in the 75th percentile or higher. KIPP Academy Nashville only recruits from the two lowest-performing high school zones in the city of Nashville. Together, those two high schools produced only five college-ready seniors in 2016.

Students in the bottom quartile must attain more than one year's growth if they have hopes of ever making up that ground. To commit her team to this vision each year, Miguez uses the story of college basketball coach Jim Valvano who took his team to the court at the beginning of the season to have them cut down the nets, so he could simulate what it would feel like when they won the championship at the end of the season. For teachers, the equivalent is imagining the success all the students will have achieved on that last day of school.

Teachers say the high expectations and demands for transparency are balanced with support to help them improve. *"Her goals are at the same time both audacious and big, while still being reasonable and achievable for the staff,"* says teacher Kristen Sueing. *"She really communicates to us that she believes in our potential to achieve them. She communicates the same things to the kids."*

When KIPP Academy Nashville switched to Common Core, *"that was a hard shift that we made, and for teachers, it was really scary because a lot of stuff was new,"* recalls Clemmons. *"There was a lot of fear and uncertainty and encouraging people to trust her through the change and the transition."* Miguez connected Common Core to the bigger vision and explained how it would help them reach 79 percent. When they hit some bumps, she encouraged teachers to stay the course.

Miguez has a strong vision for the systems and

structures to build to help the staff achieve its goals. *"She prefers to see the problem, create the system and then address it and attack before it ever becomes an issue,"* Clemmons says. The true test of whether the structures and systems she's built are solid comes when she is not in the building. Everything should run the same way that it does when she is in the building. *"My job is to not have a job because everyone is executing on what they're supposed to do so well,"* she says.

Change Management

OBJECTIVE

Strategic planning is used to guide change management with an 80/20 focus.

DRIVERS:

- The main goal for the school and the plan to accomplish the goal have been clearly articulated.
- The entire staff is bought into the mission and vision for the school.
- Progress towards goals is monitored to determine effectiveness of strategies.
- Course correction occurs as necessary to ensure that the most effective plan and strategies are implemented.
- Staff time is appropriately focused on the annual goals and the key strategies, while managing urgent matters effectively.

Today, the KIPP Academy Nashville team continues to stare data in the face. In quarterly reflections, staff members take one step back to gauge where they are toward the larger goal, celebrate successes, reinvest in the mission, then motivate with a healthy sense of urgency. Some teachers might walk into the quarterly meeting lamenting that the whole room will know if they failed to hit their goals. *"But it's just what it is. Let's not dwell on it,"* Miguez says.

Most importantly, the focus should be: *"Here's*

what we are going to do about it. Let's make a game plan," she says.

Once a solid foundation was in place, Miguez started considering the next layers she would add to the school. Not everything could be tackled at once. In setting priorities for the year, she keeps them data-based and focused, so they are achievable. *"When you try to do 35 things all really well and hold yourself super accountable to everything, it's an overwhelming feeling,"* Miguez says.



Teachers at KIPP say the high expectations and demands for transparency are balanced with supports to help them improve.

As she began to shift the culture to a more data-driven one, she pushed for teachers to align exit tickets to a specific aim. *"You need to have an aim aligned with an exit ticket. Period. Every day. That was the first step to driving teacher action in the same direction,"* Miguez says. With that alignment in place, if students didn't reach mastery, *"we know at least those two things are aligned, and you're not getting them there in between, so we can say, 'Is this a planning issue? Is this an execution issue? What do you need?' And we started intentionally coaching teachers."*

Miguez implemented regular observation, feedback and lesson plan coaching. Every teacher received the same number of observations and meetings, to help make that culture shift. She adopted a handbook to bring consistency to schoolwide discipline. Teachers were giving detentions when they personally thought a student deserved one, but that led to wide interpretation.

"Now we have a very clear paycheck system where there are certain behaviors that earn detention after school," she says. It's a system enforced from classroom to classroom schoolwide.

The following year, Miguez pressed forward to improve the staff's response to data, training teachers in the data-driven instruction cycle so they would be prompted to continuously reflect on data and develop action plans. The staff added more positive discipline systems and launched efforts to better communicate to students what they were doing well.

The next layer was investing in teachers. *"I started being a lot more intentional in how we treat people and talk to people and invest in people,"* Miguez says. *"That's when we got away from one-on-ones every week with people who are really competent. In my opinion, it was wasting their time to some extent—the idea of earned autonomy is respectful, coupled with 'we still want everybody to grow.'" she says.* Miguez didn't abandon coaching for teachers in this category; she just loosened the reins a bit. *"It's really respectful to say to someone who uses their time really wisely in school and gets all their lesson planning done, 'If I'm going to take this time from you every single week, maybe every other time, it's just yours,'" she says.* Miguez made it a priority for the leadership team to share when teachers were doing well, creating a document to track contact with staffers. *"You can get a lot more out of people when you respect them as the professional that they are,"* she says.

As for determining priorities, data often makes it clear, Miguez says. *"If we have a year where turnover of teachers is higher or lower, that determines where am I going to go with priorities,"* she says. Two years ago, she had really low teacher turnover, so that was a year where she felt confident launching a new initiative because the foundation of teachers was solid. In a high turnover year, *"we might need to go back to some of the basics,"* she says. This year, she has prioritized lower school literacy, science and social studies.

Both academic data and behavior data indicated those were hotspots. Quarterly, she sits down to set her priorities for the weeks ahead.

Her biggest challenge is knowing how hard to push. If someone suggests the staff could move faster toward a goal, she pauses to consider the impact it could have on something else. *"I'm constantly thinking about 'How much more can we do and push?' versus 'OK, things are good, and people seem stable and happy,'" she says. "'What's next?' versus 'How much change and stress and time will this cost?'"*

When Miguez took over as school leader, she replaced 60 percent of the staff, with about half of those people deciding to leave on their own

High-Performing Team

OBJECTIVE

The team is committed to the vision, strategies, and tactics to accomplish the goals.

DRIVERS:

- Staff expectations and non-negotiables are clear.
- Staff is bought into the vision of the school and is free of blockers or resistors.
- A hiring process is conducted with clear alignment to staff expectations and non-negotiables, and the school is staffed to meet the needs of the students.
- Onboarding and development of staff is systematic, fosters buy-in and trust, and results in high levels of teacher retention.
- Teachers are celebrated for their accomplishments and progress toward school goals.
- Performance levels are communicated directly and promptly to all staff.
- Staff is consistently held accountable to job expectations.

and half not invited back, she says. She shifted the school organizational chart to a structure that relied on two assistant principals who coached teachers. *"One of the biggest trajectories for me was I ran the school like a dean of students and a dean of operations for the first one to two years while I learned academics,"* Miguez says. She made sure her assistant principals knew instruction inside and out. When hiring, *"I hired people straight up, point blank, who do things well that I don't do well,"* she says.

When it comes to hiring, candidates should have a love of kids and a self-awareness. *"Your perception of where you are versus where you actually are is really important,"* she says. Miguez also looks for the competitive edge that comes with wanting to do well and wanting kids to do well. An "it" factor also comes into play. It may look different depending on the teacher, but her top-performing teachers all seem to have an "it" factor, either through their ability to command the room or their energy.

The recruitment team conducts the first screening of applicants via an informal phone interview. That's followed by an in-person interview. If the candidate is still under consideration, he or she would be asked to do a sample lesson and invited for a half-day experience at KIPP Academy Nashville to meet team members, observe classes and have a final interview.

Summer professional development exposes new teachers to the routines that help teachers be successful. Math teacher Katie Draper says she values the thinking that goes into developing those procedures for every step of the day. *"From the time kids come in the door, we have discussions about what does that look like? What does greeting kids at the door look like? How do we have them coming in? We'll set them up for success before they even get to homeroom,"* says Draper. *"Every little piece, a lot of other people might overlook—our leadership is just very intentional."*

Teacher Robel Yared, who is new to the staff, says the summer professional development—with role-playing and trainings on assessments, exit tickets and feedback—put him in an advanced position to start the school year. *“Seeing actual practice from people who have been here was really powerful for me,”* says Yared. *“This is the bar here at KIPP, which is pretty high, and this is where I need to be by the time school begins. Seeing that in action and getting the chance to engage in those conversations really helped.”*

Rubrics spell out for the staff what high expectations look like, and video clips help bring them to life. During regular one-on-one meetings with leaders, teachers will role play and practice as well. *“Teachers for a while were not comfortable with practicing,”* assistant principal Molly Trenkamp says. But now it is a regular part of the day, which has pushed teachers to new levels, she says.

Draper worked closely with Trenkamp, who made frequent classroom visits and reviewed lesson plans daily. Draper finds it strange when she hears her teaching friends talk about being nervous for an upcoming observation. *“They’re like, ‘Oh, I have my observation coming up!’ And everybody’s always in our classrooms, always giving feedback. I don’t know what’s formal, what’s informal, because everybody’s always in there,”* Draper says. Someone pops in her classroom for 10 minutes, and a short time later, she gets an email pointing out something done well, and offering a new tip. *“And you can go and do that in your very next class. It’s always very actionable steps,”* Draper says. *“The amount of feedback we get is amazing, and it says a lot that everybody in this building is the type who just loves every bit of feedback they could possibly get. No one is nervous for anyone to come into their classroom. We want you to point out what is wrong so we can fix it.”*

Trenkamp often has teachers record themselves in the classroom, then watch it to give feedback themselves. Together, they will identify an action step from it. With the intense feedback, Draper’s class made significant growth, showing the payoff

for the coaching investment. *“If leaders have the time to put into teachers, the bars could be raised and raised and raised,”* Trenkamp says.

As for formal evaluations, the school leadership team does a baseline evaluation by the end of the first month of school to gauge where teachers are with high expectations, culture, rigor and data-driven instruction. Then they repeat the evaluations in November, February and May.



When Miguez took over at KIPP, she replaced 60 percent of the staff. Half of those people decided to leave on their own and half were not invited back.

Teacher Kristen Sueing says that Miguez is clear about the future she sees for them as teachers and leaders. In her first year as grade team leader, Sueing says she’s getting support from Miguez, the assistant principals and the deans to help her take on the new responsibilities. Building a pipeline of grade team leaders, assistant principals and principals has been a focus for Miguez. The KIPP Nashville region formalized the leader development approach into a “70-20-10 system,” which calls for 70 percent of an employee’s preparation for a new role to come through on-the-job learning, 20 percent to come through coaching and feedback, and 10 percent through more formal trainings. *“When I go into a meeting with someone, beforehand, I usually try to spend time thinking what is the best version of this person, what do I see them as in their full potential, their best version?”* Miguez says. Staff members credit her ability to balance teams according to the strengths of members.

As a former teacher at the school, Miguez has retained her role as a team member, alongside the teachers. *“When she’s presenting the goals for the school year, as a teammate, I’m not looking at her as solely the leader, as something I must execute, and she’s not part of this,”* says dean Adrianna Clemmons. *“She very much works to classify herself as part of the team and an equal member doing just as much work and heavy lifting as the teachers are to make these things happen. That is a major source of investment that our teachers feel when it comes to following her in making sure we meet our goals.”*

Miguez doesn’t shy away from being honest or direct when necessary, but will add: *“We’re going to do it. I’m going to help you,”* Clemmons says. That *“makes us feel as if we can accomplish it, even if it feels unattainable, and it gives us a really strong foundation for why what we’re doing is important.”*



Assistant principal Hada Flores and learning specialist Keayana Robinson are just two of the people working in tandem with Principal Miguez to help students achieve more.

When communicating changes to her staff, Miguez says her first question is always, ‘Who are the key stakeholders—Parents? Kids? Just teachers?’ She approaches team members far in advance with a draft of what she’s thinking, then asks for their thoughts. *“I try to ask questions and listen, a lot, and get a good feel for how hard is this change actually going to be,”* Miguez says. She also considers who should deliver the news of the change. Is it best to come from her to the entire

staff? Is it something they should hear from a grade team leader who has already bought into it? Is it something that should come from the content team? *“I try to be strategic about who is the best person to communicate this, and a lot of times, it’s actually not me,”* she says. *“Ultimately, I think the people who are going to be implementing it and holding people accountable to it should deliver the message.”*

Instead of being a referee, Miguez prefers to coach staffers to deal with peers on their own. *“There are plenty of examples where peers have said, ‘You just said this, and it isn’t appropriate,’ or ‘Here’s what it made me think you believe or think when you say this,’”* she says. Recently, a staff member came to her with a concern about something another staff member did, and Miguez role-played responses to encourage her to handle it on her own. She prefers to give teachers the tools and to talk them through it instead of taking it over herself.

As a natural problem solver, she found early on in her role as principal that she was solving everyone’s problems. She’s since backed away from doing that. *“I want my school to be a place where every single person who works here and attends feels the exact same ownership as I do,”* she says. *“When something goes wrong, I want everybody to feel it in the same way I feel it. That’s important to me, so I try to create the opportunity to do that.”*

Miguez has augmented her messaging over the years to emphasize wins and successes as well. *“It’s easy to go down that road of nothing is where it needs to be and you can focus all your time and energy on everything that’s going wrong, and I think I’ve been there at times,”* Miguez says. *“A mistake I’ve made is portraying that to the team. When you’re working really hard and doing everything I’m asking you to do, and I’m still telling you it’s not good enough, what message does that send to people?”* During the quarterly staff data meetings, she asks everyone to bring a slide that highlights a success, whether it be a story of a specific student’s progress, or overall class results.

"Some people have really rough quarters, and everybody knows it, and they're like, 'Now I have to talk about a success?' And I'm like, 'Yes, there are a lot of things going really well, and you need to be reminded of that,'" Miguez says.

When she runs quarterly data meetings, Miguez incorporates an inspirational hook to help connect the staff to the goal, such as the story of how running a four-minute mile used to be considered impossible, just like it would have been considered impossible to hit the numbers KIPP Academy Nashville plans to hit. But one runner believed he could break the four-minute mark, and he did. Others then started to believe it possible, and were able to succeed as well. She invests the team in the idea that KIPP Academy Nashville will break the barrier for their students. *"You hit the next mark, you set a new personal record, then you set a new goal, then you set a new personal record, then you set a new goal. That's the mindset I bring to*

Constructive Environment

OBJECTIVE

A highly constructive learning environment exists that supports academic productivity.

DRIVERS:

- Expectations and behavior management systems that support high levels of academic productivity are clear.
- The entire staff is bought into the behavior management system and is used to holding students accountable.
- All classrooms have established an environment that is conducive to learning.
- Staff members are held accountable to upholding the behavior management system and hold students accountable.
- The behavior management system works for most students.
- Interventions are available for students who do not respond to school behavior management system.

everything we set out to accomplish," she says.

The behavior management system works for most students. Interventions are available for students who do not respond to school behavior management system.

The paycheck system used for behavior assumes that all students can meet expectations consistently. Each student starts with \$50 as his or her salary. *"We expect you're going to do what you've signed up to do,"* explains dean Adrianna Clemmons. *"You are capable of doing this, so you are starting with all your money. But if you don't, there's the possibility you could lose money."* The staff holds fun weekly team-building time, and students must have a \$35 paycheck to attend. Students who do not meet a basic expectation, such as not having their homework, receive a \$1 deduction. It's \$2 off for common misbehaviors such as talking or having a uniform infraction. A \$3 deduction is reserved for more serious issues and is also tied to a consequence of automatic detention after school. *"If something is happening multiple times within 30-45 minutes, something else needs to happen now because a student is very off task,"* Clemmons says. Disrespect to the teacher, class disruption, throwing a paper ball, laughing loudly on purpose to distract the class, lying—*"all those things are major issues for us,"* Clemmons says. *"The way we explain it to kids is they affect our school climate in such a way that it is like a major disruption."* Three \$3 deductions in a week can lead to a one-day suspension. The system provides a kind of clarity that Clemmons says has been transformative, *"because then no one is making up consequences."* The system works for the majority of kids, but she says KIPP Academy Nashville does have a higher number of suspensions. *"We're honest about that. The rules, especially for kids coming in the fifth grade from other metro schools, are a lot stricter than at other schools,"* she says.

Most students suspended once are never suspended again, Clemmons says. Sometimes, for those students who are suspended multiple times,



Principal Miguez with a student. Photo courtesy of KIPP Academy Nashville.

"we have learned over time that some kids just need a different set of supports," she says.

The deductions and positive behavior are tracked using an online system that can be accessed via tablets or computers. The system was built by a former intern of the school, who has since launched a company around the system he built. The data produced enables Miguez and the leadership team to see how many students have been suspended, received a detention or are not completing homework so they can analyze and determine the root causes. For the most part, students have not experienced success for their first five years in other schools. If the kids continue to struggle academically or behaviorally, that's often a contributing factor to wanting to leave the school. Staff members develop plans for kids they suspect might leave at the end of the year and try to reach out to parents. *"We say, 'It may not have been a great year, our program is not going to change, but is there something we can do to make you feel like your kid can experience more success?'"* Miguez says.

The expectations for student behavior are clearly on display throughout the building. For fifth-graders, the year is spent teaching them what it means to be an excellent student, modeling and enforcing those behaviors. It becomes easier for students as they advance to upper grades because the behavior is habit by then. Teachers try to spotlight exemplary behavior to the whole class

and explain why these behaviors are important for college. *"A kid who is really engaged in asking questions and pushing learning, a teacher will probably stop and say, 'I'm so appreciative of your focus and attention to detail to ask this question that's beyond where we are surface level discussing.' Kids will probably snap and say, 'That's great,'"* Miguez says. KIPP "stars" are designed to highlight the KIPP Academy Nashville values of grit, shine and team in action. At the end of class, a teacher may say that a particular student earned a KIPP star for grit for pushing through on a difficult math problem. "College points" work similarly and are awarded to the class. Arrows on the board point to the values teachers are looking for during the lesson. By seventh and eighth grade, the kids should be able to determine on their own whether the class earned the college point. In fifth grade, it's more teacher-driven, with the teacher explaining why the class didn't earn a shine point and what they can do next time to make sure they earn it.

During summer school, the staff practices giving a deduction so that when teachers get in front of kids, teachers are more consistent from class to class and can deliver them seamlessly without disrupting the flow of the lesson. Students practice all the routines before school starts so teachers can start ingraining the culture of the school, drilling down on expectations and the language. *"At first, it is pretty difficult to give deductions to students, especially if they're unaware of what that consequence truly means,"* says teacher Kristen Sueing. *"But the more consistent that we are and the more they observe—they're in classrooms ensuring that what one classroom looks like, another one looks like—so students know when to expect a deduction, the harshness of it wears off; it truly does become a reminder for most students after a while. Rather than something that's just punitive."*

Grade team leaders have access to data that shows how teachers are using the deduction system, which helps reveal any discrepancies. *"How do these two classrooms look very similar, yet there*

are only 10 deductions here but 100 here? Why and what are we going to do about it," Miguez says. One teacher giving no deductions can undermine the culture of that grade team. "We share data on it and we talk about it," she says.

Chantelle Stoxstill, the former dean of operations who is transitioning into the dean of students role, receives an email every time a student gets a deduction so she can monitor the student. If a student earns multiple deductions, "I will pull the student, go get them out of class and reset them," she says. "Reset" can be different for each student. Stoxstill, who has been at the school 12 years, calls on her experience as a mother of five who also fosters children. Often it's "tell me what's going on, is something bothering you?" In the morning, she greets students and may offer a hug to those who need it. "Even if I give you a deduction, I make sure I follow up with why I gave the deduction, why the teacher gave the deduction, to reinforce, and it's showing them love and compassion. This doesn't mean I don't like you, it doesn't mean the teacher doesn't like you. This means this is what happened, this is what you did, let's restart it, don't let this be the end-all," she says. An average day will mean about 30 to 40 deductions schoolwide.

Students who are having trouble might be sent to the dean's office for 30 minutes for a reset and to write out their feelings. "I usually get great support from families," Stoxstill says. When a suspension occurs, she asks parents to come in for a meeting before the student can return. "The child has a letter he or she has to write talking about what led up to their suspension, and they have to take ownership of that," she says. The team also reviews paycheck data to identify trends. Teachers email her "glows" and "grows" for the student. She highlights which areas to target, and they develop a growth plan. For example, with one student who speaks out often in class, Stoxstill made cards he could hold up to his teacher to indicate that he may need a minute to deal with growing frustration. If it's more than that, he holds up a card to indicate he needs to step outside for a minute to his locker. She put a mirror and a dry erase board

Aspirational Environment

OBJECTIVE

A highly-aspirational learning environment exists that honors student experience while inspiring future accomplishments.

DRIVERS:

- Vision, values and goals for students are clear and inspiring.
- Students want to come to school because they feel known and cared for.
- Students are recognized for their growth and achievement.
- Social and emotional learning curriculum helps students develop self-regulation, positive relationship-building and decision-making skills.
- Exposure to college, career, and enrichment experiences outside of the school community inspires student investment in learning.
- Families are valued for their contributions and offered opportunities to engage in the school community.

in his locker, and she or her husband, who also works at the school, will leave a quote on the dry erase board to help get him back on track. "So, if he needs two minutes, he sees the quote, and looks in the mirror to reset himself," she says.

From the way staff members stand outside to shake her hand every morning to the demeanor of the student body, KIPP Academy Nashville was a shift for Evelyn Mancilla, now in eighth grade. "A lot of other schools, they don't have professional students. Here there is a lot of professionalism," says Mancilla, who wants to be an engineer. "They said they will push us through college, and they've been preparing us ever since fifth grade. They're telling us to go to college and they push us to do our best," she says. The school values also helped her to evolve. "When I was in fifth and sixth grade, I used to not participate. I used to be really shy. My teachers have told me to go and show grit and

ever since then, I really have improved,” Mancilla says. She initially wanted to change schools in fifth grade, but as the teachers forged a relationship with her, she decided she didn’t want to leave. She

Data-Driven Culture

OBJECTIVE

Assessment data is used to drive differentiation.

DRIVERS:

- Purpose and expectations of schoolwide growth and interim assessment data processes are clear.
 - Staff is bought into using data to differentiate instruction.
 - Valid and reliable growth and interim assessments that match Common Core/ College Readiness Standards for all grades and content have been adopted.
 - Timely, leader- and teacher-owned processes are conducted to assess, analyze, and act on data at the schoolwide and individual student level.
 - Teachers are held accountable to analyzing and using data.
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saw how the habits teachers emphasize helped students focus on their work. *“Ms. Sueing forces you to do the best every day,”* she says.

Camiqueka Fuller, the office manager and a parent, says the school’s emphasis on college in its messaging, along with physical reminders such as college pennants, puts the children in the mindset of this is *“where you want to go versus where you are.”*

From day one, the talk is about their future self. When 10-year-olds make a mistake, teachers remind them of a future as possibly an engineer or a doctor. *“I’m speaking to you as that 21-year-old engineering student, not as the 10-year-old being defiant on purpose,”* Miguez says. *“That’s the idea behind everything. When I’m speaking to you at*

any point, I’m making this connection to you right now—if this continues or this doesn’t adjust, this is the detriment it’s going to have on your potential to be a college graduate.”

“Where will your GPA take you?” reads one poster, detailing the universities where students need a 3.5 grade point average to get in, and the ones that take students with a 2.5. Similarly, other posters depict how the test scores students are earning now indicate whether they are college ready.

All homerooms are named after the universities where teachers earned their degrees. College visits every quarter combine a half-day visit to a university with a half day spent somewhere like the zoo. A KIPP team helps alumni to, and through, college. Some alumni have started returning to the school to work.

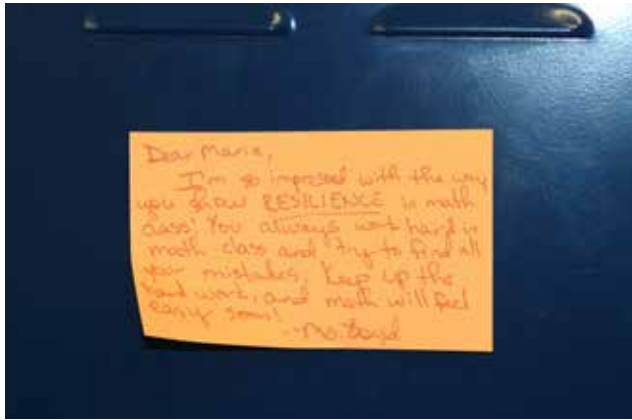
KIPP Academy Nashville has a parent involvement committee that organizes events to bring parents into the school. The organization Communities in Schools tracks down support families may need, providing everything from clothing to bus passes.

Fuller says she’s honest about the school when parents come in for tours: *“It’s rigorous; it’s disciplined. There’s homework every night.”*

The staff has translated what the school values of shine, grit and team look like so they are actionable for students. With shine, students are doing their work as they should, communicating in a calm, respectful tone, taking pride in their work and treating others well. For grit, students approach obstacles with an “I can do it” mindset, engage in learning with a sense of urgency and set ambitious goals. For team, students are helping each other, showing respect and patience, accepting responsibility and leading. Every week the classes have to meet a certain threshold to earn rewards.

Teachers track how many positive phone calls are made to parents. *“Kids are doing so much so well, we tend to focus on 5 percent of kids who keep blowing up in class—that’s not the reality of your day,”* Miguez says.

Colorful post-its adorn a number of student lockers, offering inspirational messages, such as this one: *"Dear Maria, I am so impressed with the way you show resilience in math class. You always work hard in math class and try to find all your mistakes. Keep up the hard work and math will feel easy soon!--Ms. Boyd."*



Teachers often leave inspirational notes like this one on student lockers to motivate them.

Teacher Misty Caldwell is virtually a blur as she moves quickly around the edge of her fifth-grade math class, shooting a glance at each student's paper to make sure they all are grasping the step she needs them to understand.

"The first place to start is; Do you know where your kids are at every point in the lesson?" Miguez says. *"Are you giving kids feedback ongoing throughout the lesson, do you have your exemplar response, do you know what you're looking for and then are you giving feedback to kids based on where they fall?"* It's modeled in professional development and by coaches in the classroom.

"We actively monitor in class. We'll walk around, and if there's a common mistake we see made, we stop it and we address it in the moment," Caldwell says. *"If there's an almost-there paper, we'll show it, so that we can say, 'We're almost there, what's this one student missing?' A lot of time students are able to learn from each other's work in the moment before we get to that exit ticket time."*

On this day's lesson, Caldwell had one class earn 62 percent on their exit ticket. She determined that students were missing a decimal, then getting confused. In her next class, she addressed the problem right away and had students flip to the back of their papers and go through the steps together. They seemed to get it, and earned 77 percent on the exit ticket. She is planning a reteach to the classes that didn't perform as well, because the skill will come into play later.

Exit ticket data is reviewed daily so teachers can determine if they need to review a skill the next day. The data can be immediately helpful as well, as demonstrated by Caldwell's lesson. *"It's important after teaching one class to know the misconceptions so you can try to target it into the next class,"* Caldwell says. After tests, teachers sit down with their team and do a data-driven plan. *"Is everyone picking A? Why are they picking A? What's the misconception?"* she says. *"Are we going to reteach it, are we going to spiral it, are we going to put it on the back of homework, does it need scaffolding?"* Plans are reviewed with coaches.

Student work is also analyzed in team meetings. *"In English, it's a little more difficult to use data, because it's not a numerical score every time. Sometimes our feedback is really qualitative,"* says teacher Kristen Sueing. *"But when we meet as a team, we really do delineate what is the problem, where are students, where are the gaps, how are we as teachers not being consistent, and then we use that data the next day."*

Assistant principals help novice teachers pull data reports and go through an item analysis by standard and question. Together they develop a plan.

To provide data, new students take NWEA in the fall. All students take NWEA in the winter and spring, as well as module (unit) assessments for math and science. ELA and social studies also have mid-module assessments. For benchmark data, the staff uses AIMSweb and M-comp. Teachers have a template they use to report data to their assistant

principal when they give an assessment, says Trenkamp.

Students are well aware of their own data and which class is in the lead. In Caldwell's class, as in many others, the data is posted on the wall, along with a list of students exceeding, and those who have grown. *"They know they want to be first place,"* Caldwell says. When students enter the class, they will check how other classes performed. *"I tell them that our thing is 'growth matters.' If you were in the red last month, but you made it to the yellow, you're not to the blue yet, but that's OK, we have all year,"* she says. *"You made growth, and that needs to be celebrated so we showcase that as well."*

Miguez creates numerous Google docs to track data. *"I pretty much look at all pieces of data in multiple cuts,"* she says. *"If we're looking at suspensions, how many of these are repeat, how many of these kids have been suspended more than once, how many of these kids fall into each grade level, how many fall into each demographic category, what was the offense breakdown, what are the trends?"*

She steps back frequently to consider the whole school's focus and whether shifts need to be made. Recently, she determined that reading results had plateaued as compared to math and science. *"We talked about doing enough to teach kids legitimately how to read, what are the techniques of a good reader, as opposed to focusing on standards and saying, 'Are you using the best piece of evidence to support this claim?' We made a full programmatic change this year,"* Miguez says.

When reflecting on the schoolwide discipline data, Miguez realized that 85 percent of the suspensions were coming from disruptions to class. *"When I was a teacher here, if a kid got suspended, it was for a fight,"* Miguez says. Physical altercations are rare now, and she realized the detentions being given weren't for egregious behaviors. But *"every system and every policy you have should reflect what you believe,"* she says. And class disruptions are serious

to staff members, because it interferes with the school mission.

Black Belt Teaching

OBJECTIVE

Teachers effectively plan and implement the curriculum.

DRIVERS:

- Curriculum includes a vertical scope and sequence aligned to standards and guides teacher planning.
- Teacher and student schedules maximize student learning and teacher development.
- Whole group instruction is engaging, rigorous and aligned to standards.
- Students receive individualized or small-group instruction based on assessment outcomes.
- Data trends from assessments, observations, and walkthroughs are used to support teacher effectiveness through whole school professional development.
- Staff receive frequent coaching and valuable feedback on their teaching performance.

At leadership meetings every Monday, Miguez, the deans and the assistant principals review academic and nonacademic data, and they also use it in their one-on-ones with teachers. Grade team leaders get a more strategic cut of student and homeroom data.

Assistant principals know to own the assessment data, and that if something is in the yellow or red range, they should be prepared to discuss it and determine action steps. If it's green, keep going. Every Monday afternoon, the team should know exactly where the school is.

The schedule and structures are created with the goal of maximizing instructional time. *"We have a culture of every minute matters, period,"* Miguez says. It also reflects her priorities, as this year's schedule was built to emphasize literacy. *"We need*

more time for that than anything else right now based on the deficits for incoming students,” she says.

The staff starts with a morning meeting at 7:15 a.m., before going into homeroom at 7:30 a.m. where students have breakfast and their own morning meeting to check homework and get set for the day. Teaching starts at 8 a.m. and students go home at 3:30 p.m.

The schedule is organized to give students two 80-minute ELA blocks, an ELA intervention block and a math intervention block. The lower school only gets one intervention block with guided reading embedded into the schedule. The intervention blocks *“give us an opportunity in the day where kids don’t miss any sort of class in order to attend. We can do small group,”* Miguez says. Three interventionists are on staff to pull kids out of class or provide one-on-one support. *“You’ll also see teachers pull kids during planning or lunch time to move the needle on what kids need,”* Miguez says. Math and science teachers include a reteach block in each lesson plan.

Teachers have 110 minutes of planning time a day, with weekly content meetings, grade level team meetings and one-on-one meetings with their assistant principal. The agenda that teams use for weekly meetings prompt them to analyze student work in an in-depth way. The meetings also help teachers collaborate across grade levels. Teacher Misty Caldwell says that a sixth-grade teacher shared a common problem her students were having with decimals. *“I listened to how she was doing it, and said, ‘We need to start it in fifth grade using the same type of strategy,’”* she says. *“Our being able to collaborate as a math team has really helped us and really pushed our scores.”*

When needed, whole school professional development takes the place of the weekly grade team meeting. Most initiatives are run through the grade teams or content teams, because the plan might roll out differently according to the grade or content.



“A lot of other schools, they don’t have professional students. Here there is a lot of professionalism,” says student Evelyn Mancilla.

Coaches use rubrics from the KIPP Nashville region as well as from Uncommon Schools. Teachers turn in lesson plans if they are on an improvement plan or if they want feedback. Teachers are required to display the lesson plan on a clipboard outside their door by 8 a.m. and should have determined what exemplar responses look like. Some are more detailed than others, with questions typed out and varying level of answers included, depending on the teacher’s skillset.

As for curriculum, science and social studies is created internally. Literacy is a KIPP-provided curriculum, and math is Eureka Math through Engage NY, with adjustments made to help close the gap for students coming in grade levels behind.

Before each module, teams will dive deep into the next module of 30 lessons to immerse themselves in the material, the standards, the assessments and lesson plans, explains assistant principal Hada Flores, who coaches the ELA team. The ELA team also is transitioning to a deeper focus on student work.

The direction Miguez is driving the staff toward is one where students are taking more control of their learning. Teachers have a clear aim and objective and either a culminating question or exit ticket that will show if kids understand it. *“Everything in between should be facilitated thinking for kids,”* Miguez says. *“There are going to be times when we have to teach an explicit*

skill and teachers are going to have to impart that knowledge, but how often can we ask good questions and set kids up to discover and do the critical thinking and analysis work that needs to be done?"

She also wants teachers to be sure that they are not just hearing from the top 10 percent in those conversations. *"Every kid has an entry point into that lesson and that conversation,"* Miguez says.



At KIPP Academy Nashville, students are taking more control of their learning and teachers have a clear aim thanks to the vision of Principal and Ryan Awardee Laura Miguez Howarth.