



Educators in East Syracuse Minoa Central School District in New York State recently learned that their focus on increasing student engagement has put the district at the very top of a prestigious list. Among all districts in New York State with more than 200 students, ESM showed the single greatest increase in graduation rates—an eleven-percentage-point jump from 81 percent in 2016 to 92 percent in 2017. Compare this jump to the statewide average, which remained constant at 80 percent over the same period.

The district saw increased graduation rates across all segments of the student population. Graduation rates for students with disabilities and for economically disadvantaged students rose by 16 percent and 18 percent respectively, bringing graduation rates for these segments of the student population close to the overall graduation rate. The percentage of graduating students who received an Advanced Regents diploma, which requires more rigorous coursework, increased from 33 percent to 47 percent. With increased graduation rates have come higher levels of student achievement, as ESM is one of only 26 NY districts to be placed on the Advanced Placement honor roll for 2017. To qualify for the Advanced Placement honor roll, a district must have diverse enrollment in AP classes, along with high AP test scores.

Kathy Southwell is Executive Director of Curriculum, Learning, & Assessment at ESM. Kathy credits ESM's success to two things: (1) the hard work staff and students have done to make these impressive gains and (2) ESM's ambitious ten-year strategic plan. According to Kathy, "The first five years of our ten-year plan focused on culture—on creating a learning environment that both insisted on and nurtured continuous improvement. The second five years of the plan, which we're still in, have been about creating a unified instructional approach."

To build this unified approach, ESM adopted Silver Strong & Associates' Thoughtful Classroom Framework as the district's instructional model. "The Thoughtful Classroom has made our work in creating a unified instructional approach so much easier—and so much more effective. It has given all our staff members a common language for instruction and a powerful set of instructional tools. Thoughtful Classroom tools* have provided clarity on highly effective instructional practices aligned with specific instructional purposes. These tools also give our teachers more strategies to engage students and increase their critical thinking—factors that we believe have played an important role in our increased graduation rates," says Kathy.

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Kathy Southwell,
Dir. of Curriculum, Learning, & Assessment
ESM Central School District

Looking at the Data

In early 2018, The New York State Department of Education released the 2017 graduation rates for New York districts. East Syracuse Minoa saw the greatest gains of all districts with 200 or more students. ESM also made gains in other key areas. ESM's graduation rates stand out, especially when compared to the state average.

Graduation Rate	State Avg. 2017	ESM - 2016	ESM - 2017	Percentile Gain
Overall Graduation Rate	80 %	81 %	92 %	11 %
Students with Advanced Regents Diplomas	33 %	33 %	47 %	13 %
Students with Disabilities	54 %	62 %	80 %	16 %
Economically Disadvantaged Students	73 %	69 %	85 %	18 %

*NOTE: These Thoughtful Classroom tools can be found in *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment* (2012), *Tools for Conquering the Common Core* (2015), *Tools to Start the School Year* (2016), and *Tools for Classroom Instruction That Works* (2018). Learn more at www.ToolsforTodaysEducators.com.