

# Arizona high school creates a purposeful community and a new reality



## The Challenge

After 20 years of negative public perception; flat student achievement scores; and disengaged students, staff, and community, the leaders of Barry Goldwater High School (BGHS), a large, comprehensive, suburban public high school in Phoenix, Arizona, were at a critical juncture. They were a school of extremely diverse learners, from a large population of special-needs students, to English-language learners, to students in the prestigious International Baccalaureate program. With a generally transient population (40% coming and going during the school year) and a surrounding community considered low to low-middle socio-economic status, either they could remain static or they could create a new reality.

## Strategic Solution

McREL provided Principal Mike Andersen the sound, research-based leadership strategies he needed to lead the entire school and community to fulfill their vision, “to be the global role model for academic excellence and innovation.” Using McREL’s Purposeful Community Reflection Tool to collect unbiased data, the staff and administration addressed four areas: (1) collective efficacy, (2) outcomes that matter to all, (3) agreed-upon processes, and (4) use of all available assets. Each of these played a vital role in the school’s four-year journey toward having an aligned vision and a more positive school climate. The prevailing constants were the consistent and authentic use

of the 21 McREL leadership responsibilities and a commitment to developing a purposeful community.

## Results

The school now has a set of Operating Ideals and Beliefs that is the foundation of a system wherein everyone pays attention to listening, gathering input, communicating, applying strategies, being flexible, and validating successes. In addition, they have successfully navigated two major change initiatives: (1) standards-based grading and (2) developing a capstone project requirement for all seniors.

The process was truly an evolution over time. “The initiatives and strategies were effective in developing a purposeful community, which, in turn, led to a slow and methodical increase in student achievement as evidenced by state assessments over the same time period,” said Andersen. In 2011, BGHS became the first and only high school in Arizona named a “Beat the Odds” school, as well as being named an “A+ School of Excellence” by the Arizona Education Foundation.

## Next Steps

Moving forward, BGHS will strive to further increase student achievement by establishing a culture of continuous improvement and by raising expectations for students’ dress and language—in other words, by expecting students to “look and act” like an A+ School of Excellence.