

Building a Strong Foundation: **SHIVE ELEMENTARY**



Supporting the Whole Child

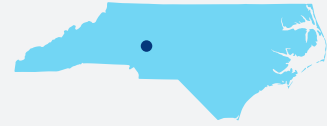
At Rowan-Salisbury Schools (RSS), we have a guiding belief: **children are more than their test scores.** We know not every student learns in the same way—and that when educators have the flexibility to try new, innovative teaching approaches, we can truly help students learn and succeed.

That's why the RSS team called state legislators with a bold request. **We asked for charter-like flexibility that would empower our schools and local Board of Education with more autonomy.** The policymakers were inspired by our data and experience-backed vision. They introduced legislation, which passed in less than a month. North Carolina's Renewal district was born!

Through our Renewal status, we enjoy curriculum, personnel, financial and scheduling flexibility. Every school in our district has created a plan to serve their students' specific needs, while building academic and interpersonal skills—and helping students pursue their unique life goals, too.

Now, through our case studies, we're sharing more specifics about what we've done, how we've done it and what school leaders across the country can try in their own districts.

ABOUT SHIVE ELEMENTARY



LOCATION
ROCKWELL, NC

GRADES
K-5

SIZE
~450 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

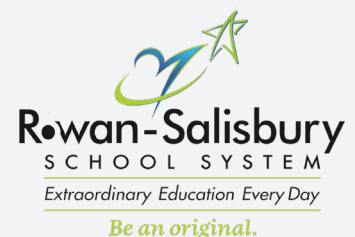
Like thousands of kids across the country, Shive students needed additional support with math, social-emotional skills and figuring out what they are passionate about.

SOLUTION:

The school created a customized set of programs for kids, including life skills education, building in real world experiences to the curriculum, specific math support and a mentor program.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, calendar and scheduling flexibilities.



THE CHALLENGE

At Shive Elementary, education leaders knew they they could create even stronger programs for kids in three key areas:

1

ACCESSING REAL WORLD EXPERIENCES.

The Shive team knew that exploring real-world opportunities is critical in serving the whole child—and helping kids build excitement about learning and future careers. Kids needed more hands-on activities to make learning real for them and to help build understanding about school's purpose for them specifically.

2

BUILDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) AND LIFE SKILLS.

Through conversations with students, surveys and research, the Shive Elementary team learned that students would benefit from building SEL skills, in addition to practical skills to help them succeed as they continue their education. From teaching children how to order in a restaurant to how to shake hands, the team knew that building a strong foundation sets students up for success throughout their lives.

3

FOCUSING (EVEN MORE) ON MATH.

Data and feedback from students let the team know that Shive students—like so many other students across the country—were struggling with math concepts.



How the Team Identified the Need

Shive Elementary started the Renewal process by analyzing the school's data, conducting in-depth research and engaging key stakeholders like kids and families.



Staff Engagement

As part of Renewal, Shive Elementary created a **teacher-led design team** named the Blazers.

The Blazers included at least one teacher from every grade level, in addition to other professionals such as counselors. Shive wanted to ensure they had input from every level.

As part of this team, staff members worked together to evaluate what's working at Shive and where there are opportunities to try innovative teaching practices to help students thrive. They also participated in a Summer Leadership Summit.

Now, the team continues making decisions together, and then takes these decisions back to grade teams for feedback—ensuring it's a fully collaborative process. As part of staff engagement, the team participates in professional development as well, specifically focused on Renewal priorities.



Family Engagement

The Shive team prioritized and **continues prioritizing parent and caregiver**

engagement throughout its Renewal work. The team has organized big family nights to ensure families have an opportunity to learn more about Shive's work and to ask questions, too. They also make marketing materials, such as designed posters using free online design tools like Canva, reaching families with information about the school's work. This engagement is ongoing. For example, Shive invites parents to an event when students showcase what they learned in their clubs each semester and share more about why clubs are beneficial to kids as well.



Data Analysis + Research

The team started by **looking deeply at data** to identify what the biggest

needs were as a school, from social-emotional skills and integrating Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports into the data analysis to specific academic focus areas. In addition to looking at existing data, such as end of grade scores, the team conducted new, in-depth research with students. For example, they administered a panorama survey for students (third through fifth grades) that focused on social-emotional skills and how students approach everyday situations. This ensured the team made decisions based on their students' experiences specifically. The data made it clear that students needed more support with math, social-emotional learning and life skills.



Student Engagement

Shive engaged and continues engaging students

throughout the school year to ensure their feedback and interests play an integral role in Shive's Renewal work. For example, students take a survey at the end of every semester about the club they participated in (read more about this in the solution section), sharing everything from if they enjoyed the club to what other offerings they are interested in.



Continuous Improvement

Right outside the assistant principal's office, you will find a scoreboard that helps track Shive's progress when it comes to academic standards. The team believes in continuous improvement—and the teacher-led design team continues meeting every month—sometimes more than once! **The team**

tracks data and continues getting feedback from students so they can adjust their programs as needed and continue building powerful programs to help kids learn and grow.

THE SOLUTION

Serving the Whole Student Through SEL, Life Experiences and Targeted Math Programs

Based on their extensive Renewal planning process, the team decided to focus deeply on giving students real world experiences, in addition to focusing on SEL, life skills programs, personal mentorship and math support.



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It's so important to know the kids in your school, in your room. When you build relationships with kids, you can talk their language—talk about the things they are interested in and build programs that serve them. One size does not fit all. If a child wants to sit under a desk and work because it's quiet and dark there, let them! It's not just about school. It's about finding what they are passionate about, how they want to learn, what makes them excited to learn.



ZEBBIE BONDURANT
SHIVE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

The Work in Action

On any given day, you may walk onto Shive Elementary's campus and find kids, as retired principal, Zebbie Bondurant describes it, greasy from head to toe—and happy about it, because they've been taking an engine apart and learning, hands on. On another, you can find them with paint brushes in hand as they participate in art club. What it all has in common is **focusing on the whole child—and ensuring that kids have plenty of opportunities to experience new things, learn what they are interested in and start creating a plan for successful school and professional careers.**



Shive Offers Kids Real World Experiences

At Shive, every student (and even staff members!) have a star. Kids list their passions on their star—and then get to update them each year to see how they've grown and learned! As part of helping kids discover their passions, Shive offers lots of opportunities to explore different options.

- **Introducing students to career options and real-world experiences.** The Shive team works closely with the local community, businesses and parents to ensure kids are exposed to exciting experiences. For example, Shive leaders worked with Novant Health Rowan Medical Center to organize a helicopter landing, right on Shive's campus. Kids got to see it land, were able to talk with the pilot, see the inside of the helicopter and more. Medical professionals, military servicemembers, bricklayers, race car team members and more have all visited Shive, helping kids learn about different career options and how big the world truly is. And, the team works hard to ensure these experiences are hands-on. Educators

then work with students to help them learn more. For example, if a student is interested in nursing, their teachers help them figure out what goes into a career as a nurse and what the next best steps are.

- **Targeted clubs.** The teacher-led design team knew that many kids can't attend after-school activities—so they decided to bring similar enriching activities to students during the school day. Kindergarteners all join a kindergarten club, during which they learn how to succeed in school—from how to work with their classmates to what a library is. First through fifth graders get to choose a different club every semester. For example, they can learn more about the natural world through the Greenhouse Club. Students get to choose a new club every semester, giving them a wide range of experiences.

These steps ensure that even students who can't stay for after-school activities get to participate in many types of real world experiences—helping every student find their passion and path forward.



Students Build SEL and Life Skills Through Targeted Curriculums and Mentoring

During Shive's research phase, the team learned that building more social-emotional learning and life skills into the curriculum would benefit kids. The team is focusing on that in a number of ways:

- **Morning Choice.** Shive students attend Morning Choice twice a week. During these sessions, teachers focus on helping students learn skills such as critical thinking and collaboration. For example, sometimes students play board games that help them problem solve or work well with their classmates. Other activities include acting out different scenarios through fun skits, helping students think through how they would solve a problem. Every activity is fun, but also geared toward building strong skills that will help students succeed in their school careers and become successful community members, too.
- **Life Skills Curriculum.** Twice a week, teachers provide life skills lessons for kids. For example, in kindergarten, this may include ordering in the cafeteria or tying their shoes. For older kids, it may be building on those skills—like ordering in a restaurant or tying different knots. They also learn about topics such as how to regulate their emotions, which Shive's guidance counselor leads.
- **Mentoring.** The team also created a mentoring program. During the beginning of the year, teachers identify students who may benefit from additional support—whether that's because they are struggling to make friends or not thriving in their academic courses. Students are assigned a mentor, which ensures they have a specific, trusted adult rooting for them along the way. These mentors often work with students throughout their entire time at Shive, from serving as a person to simply talk with, to helping kids figure out what they are passionate about.



A Strategic Focus on Math

The data deep dive showed the Shive team that **students could use more support with math to thrive**. The team invested in math programs—such as i-Ready Mathematics and Mastery Connect—to get kids more tools to help them learn. Students have access to a math coach, too. Shive organizes small groups to help kids who need additional support as well. Teachers now look at pre- and post-tests to evaluate what's working, and where there are opportunities to tweak the process. Shive educators review the data regularly, ensuring the team is responding to exactly what kids need in real time. Teachers are already seeing students mastering more content—and having fun while doing it!

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We know when our kids need a break—so they can then be more focused on learning. It's cool that we don't feel guilty for giving them those breaks, for helping them learn and play at the same time, with the help of our scheduling flexibility.”

KRISTEN WILHELM
FIRST GRADE TEACHER

Lessons From the Shive Elementary Team

When you ask the Shive Elementary team about their Renewal process, they will tell you that it is both hard and rewarding—and that they've already seen students benefit from this work. Their biggest advice for school leaders includes:

- **Maximize your team's strength.** Your team includes smart educators with various strengths and perspectives—invite them to the table and create a space where everyone feels encouraged to participate.
- **Talk with your kids about this work.** When you express to students why you are introducing certain programs or classes—and take them along on the journey with you—you are much more likely to succeed. Kids are smart and they want to understand why they are learning and what they are learning.
- **Show, don't (just) tell.** When you take kids outside of the classroom and get their hands dirty—take them on trips, introduce them to new experiences—they learn in a completely different way. Hands-on learning is crucial in helping engage students.
- **Be open minded.** Every school is different—so the solutions will look different! Be open to trying new things to really serve your students well.
- **Don't be afraid of change.** If something isn't working, it may not be the right strategy for your students! For example, at Shive, the team tried creating a life skills program that served all grades before dividing it up into two groups (K-2 and 3-5).



Shive Elementary School's Vision

At Shive Elementary, the team focuses on the whole child with one core goal: providing every child with the best foundation they can through enriching experiences, academics and the right support. To help make this a reality, teachers are empowered with the autonomy and flexibility to respond to and engage with each child's unique needs so every day, everyone discovers and achieves the extraordinary.

As a result, students have the opportunity to explore what they're passionate about at an early age so they have plenty of time to learn and grow. From one-on-one mentoring to clubs for every student, kids are seen, heard and supported, ensuring every child has the confidence and support that will help them pursue their dreams.

Learn More about our Renewal work

- Download more case studies at resources.rssrenewal.org
- Reach out to principal Rick Dunlap at dunlaprd@rss.k12.nc.us to schedule a conversation or school visit.

