

QUICK FACTS

Location: Cooperstown, ND

Grades: Pre K - 12

Enrollment: 275



“I’ve seen more of a bridge covering the gap for harder-to-reach families so their kids have more capacity to engage in the academic world.”

— Chelsey Simonson,
Site Coordinator

IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

When Superintendent Derek Simonson first started working at Griggs County Central, the school was siloed from the rest of the community, and neither he nor the other staff had the time to cultivate connections that would open those doors.

“It was frustrating to see needs pushed to the side because of time,” Derek said.

Like many administrators, Derek didn’t have the time needed to connect the school to the resources that exist to uplift and empower students. The school staff found themselves in the same boat. Time was already too precious, adding and managing outside programming would be an impossible task.

But there was a solution: a solution that would place the school at the center of their community’s functioning, and connect the school to other North Dakota schools facing the same challenges. The district would be able to connect with schools that had found solutions.

It was an educator from another school district who first told Derek about the North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools (NDFSCS) Consortium. The educator told Derek about how implementing the ND Full-Service Community Schools model changed the landscape of their school and how the Site Coordinator had connected the school with its community, making it into a hub of resources.

Website:
griggscountycentral.org/

When a school joins the NDFSCS Consortium, a world of collaborative partnerships becomes available. By keeping Site Coordinators connected to each other, schools function smoothly as they transition from a typical school model to that of a full-service community school. As more schools join the Consortium, Site Coordinators can share the knowledge they’ve learned already rather than leaving new schools fumbling in the dark.

Derek saw the support that the Consortium offered its schools and then the ways schools and communities supported each other. District leadership decided to move forward to implement the Full-Service Community Schools model and the first step was to partner with the consortium to hire a dedicated Site Coordinator to lead local efforts.

“Working with the consortium was the perfect fit for all the right reasons,” Derek explained.

Griggs County Central needed someone who already knew the school and already knew the community. While there are many tried and true state-wide programs that empower students, North Dakota has a large amount of diversity. What works for one school may not work for another. Resources vary from community to community too, as landscapes and community composition vary.

Before she was hired as Griggs County Central’s new Site Coordinator, Chelsey Simonson had already worked for the school in a substitute capacity. Chelsey didn’t just know of the school and its community, she worked and

lived with them. She wasn't a stranger; she was already known to the students and the staff.

Griggs County Central began its implementation journey in the spring of 2023. During that first year, Chelsey spearheaded initiatives that holistically served the school's students. While each district's needs are different, Cooperstown is similar to many rural communities across North Dakota. Connecting with the community can be a challenge when folks are geographically spread out, often living on ranches and farms.

Like Griggs County Central, many rural schools joined the NDFSCS Consortium to try doing school differently. Schools in the NDFSCS Consortium believe that serving the whole student, rather than only serving the student academically, creates a strong system, community, and future. Through their Site Coordinators, the NDFSCS Consortium schools can connect with both official, structured services and community resources.

Programs like their in-school food pantry and weekend Backpack Program are connected to the school through the NDFSCS Consortium. In fact, during the first year as an ND Full-Service Community School, Chelsey's dedication led to the implementation of the Backpack Program (which sends hungry students home with backpacks full of food for the weekend) and an in-school food pantry.

Local community partners have heavily backed Chelsey and her work with Griggs County Central, leading to even more opportunities. Chelsey's highly structured programs at Griggs County Central brought another surprising

connection. When they saw her unloading a food truck from Great Plains Food Bank for their in-school pantry, some of the ranchers stopped and helped. Week after week, they helped her unload supplies.

One day, they asked her if they could donate some of their beef to the students. As cattle ranchers, they often had a surplus. Chelsey said yes and now uses her position as Site Coordinator to connect those ranchers to families. Her work keeps the community engaged and involved with the students and their lives.

"Since I started as Site Coordinator, I've seen more of a bridge covering the gap for harder-to-reach families so their kids have more capacity to engage in the academic world," Chelsey explained.

This flexibility and community connection quickly establishes Site Coordinators as vital team members. They turn the school into a hub for the community to uplift their youth while bringing valuable resources and programs through the doors. Further, the connections that the Consortium brings have proved invaluable time and time again.

"There's a peace of mind knowing that these needs are being addressed and knowing that we have a professional to help us do everything we can to meet the people where they are," Derek said. "The opportunities that have opened up for the community have been a breath of fresh air."



WHO WE ARE

We are an organization of educators, health professionals, and parents. Above all, we are a group of people passionate about helping students and schools succeed.



WHAT WE DO

We partner with local leaders to coordinate comprehensive supports in areas such as wellness, workforce readiness, and academic enrichment to help students and families thrive.



WHY WE DO IT

Students cannot learn when their basic needs are not being met, but not all schools have the resources to meet these needs. With NDFSCS, schools don't have to navigate these challenges alone.



As the North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium, we believe that students learn best when their basic needs are being met. We help coordinate comprehensive supports in areas such as wellness, workforce readiness, and academic enrichment to help students and families thrive.

Visit ndfscs.org/schools to learn more.