

MHASD Strategic Plan Information & Advocacy Report



TO: Board of Education

FROM: Sarah Straka, Director of Instruction
Sita Powell, Advanced Learning Coordinator

DATE: January 16, 2023

RE: Information and Advocacy Report - Learning and Growth & Well-Being

OVERVIEW

Board Goal I: Learning and Growth - We will graduate lifelong learners.

Objective A: Increase the percent of students "on grade level or higher" on state and local assessments among measured content areas.

- Indicator 3: Opportunities for progress-based grouping and advanced learning.

Board Goal II: Well-Being - We will provide support systems for our students and staff.

Objective C: Support and retain faculty and staff.

- Indicator 3: Professional development of staff.

INDICATORS

Indicator 3: Opportunities for Progress-Based Grouping and Advanced Learning

For general information regarding the District's Talented and Gifted Program Plan, please view the MHASD [Advanced Learners Program Guide](#). For most students, advanced learning options are embedded in the general education classroom with their peers. For some students, who are achieving at a level beyond that of their classroom peers, additional support and services are provided to challenge students and maximize growth. In addition to working with teachers in the classroom, students are encouraged or invited to participate in supplemental programs that are coordinated throughout the year.

Communication

The Advanced Learning Newsletters are created with updates about programming, upcoming events, and resources for families. These newsletters are shared with the families of identified advanced learners, administrators, and are also linked on the bottom of the main [MHASD Advanced Learning Page](#).

Our current (and only) Advanced Learning Coordinator, Sita Powell, oversees and implements each of the programs with many of these spanning two or three buildings. In the spring of 2022, the District sought the community's feedback, via an operational referendum survey, about the potential of expanding our advanced learning staffing. That solution did not rise to the short list of the most important operational needs; however, as the District continues to develop and differentiate its learning offerings and opportunities for students, additional foresight will need to be given to increasing this FTE from one position to two positions.

The next two pages of this report highlight many of the opportunities for our identified advanced learners.

Elementary and Middle School Advanced Learning Opportunities

- [Genius Hour](#): ALL students at the IC are participating in Genius Hour this year. This is an opportunity for students to dig into an area of interest/passion and learn more about it. The goal is to provide an opportunity for students to learn about something they want to learn, ask big questions, develop research skills and share their final project. We have students designing video games, coding, learning new languages, fine tuning their drawing techniques, researching topics of interest, learning about new places, building and creating in a makerspace model and so much more. It is a great opportunity to give students some autonomy in their learning, it has been a positive and motivating experience for our students.
- [Beast Academy](#): Beast Academy is a math curriculum from the Art of Problem Solving. This curriculum is designed to teach math concepts, but also to challenge students. There are currently 25 students at the IC using the online portion of their program. Students are provided with resources such as a graphic novel type digital math book, video tutorials, and puzzles. They are asked to work on Beast Academy independently throughout the week when their peers are using Dreambox math programming. All advanced learning math groups at the IC and PC, which include about 72 students, access the curriculum via reproducibles gained through a one time purchase of their teacher guide books. During each math group, students work through problem sets, the rigor and challenge level increases every few problems encouraging students to use higher order and critical thinking skills to solve the problems and complete the puzzles. During meetings, students discuss strategies, review commonly missed problems, and highlight new learning. Students find the curriculum very engaging and even ask for copies to share with family and friends. The teacher guides are also used to supplement whole classrooms with challenge extensions that align to the standards being taught.
- [Enrichment Groups](#) at the Intermediate and Primary Centers are currently focused on reading extension (e.g. critical thinking, logic, verbal reasoning) and mathematical problem-solving using a variety of strategies, logic/reasoning, explaining mathematical thinking, etc. Groups are also making connections to skills that are being taught in Journeys and Bridges and working through challenging tasks to increase their flexible thinking. In the second semester, math groups will also be participating in the [Noetic Learning Math Contest](#). The literacy groups include 52 students and the math groups include 72 students.
- [The Academy](#) is a collection of academic acceleration and enrichment programs for gifted and talented youth and now managed by Center for Advanced Academics for students in 5th-8th grade. Students have online assignments and discussions as well as three in-person classes at the MyArts Center in Madison. Currently, fifteen students are accessing this program.

- [Future Problem Solvers](#) allows students to learn a six-step model which teaches critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and decision making. Students at the MS are beginning to learn this six-step process and our middle and high school students continue to participate competitively. We have 2 teams at each school.
- [Math Clubs: Math 24](#) and district math teams are offered various activities to challenge our intermediate and middle school students. This activity is open to all students in Grades 4th - 8th and has about 25 students currently participating.

Middle and High School Advanced Learning Opportunities

In middle and high school, advanced learning needs are met through differentiation, student placement, course selections, and scheduling. Students work with their school counselor to ensure a sequence of courses that are most aligned to students' individual interests/needs and chosen college and/or career pathways. When students' course needs exceed the current high school offerings, programs such as Start College Now and Early College Credit Program are available.

- [Academic Decathlon](#): Promotes learning and academic excellence among students of varying achievement levels by developing and providing multidisciplinary academic competitions. Advisor: Racquel Drunasky (HS)
- [Science Olympiad](#): Science Olympiad is a team STEM competition that provides standards-based challenges in all 50 states. Students experience active, hands-on group participation within a series of 23 team events in each division (Division B Middle School; Division C High School) in which students start preparing for in October. Regional competition is typically the first week of February, with State competition in early April. Students compete against other schools in the state by event and as a whole team. Each year, the events are rotated to reflect the ever-changing nature of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Some of the events this year are: Codebusters, Forestry, Virology, Rocks & Minerals, Bridge, Wright Stuff, Trajectory, Geocaching, WiFi Lab, Precision Medicine, Experimental Design and Dynamic Planet. As coaches, we are asked to write, proctor and grade a test for one of the competitive events at our local Regional competition. For the 22-23 academic year, there are 30 middle school students and 25 high school students.
- [College Matters Forum](#): A half day event held at the Pyle Center in the fall. Students receive valuable information regarding college selection, how to prepare for writing essays and applications, tips for getting quality recommendations, and honors programs. Students hear from both a panel of admissions counselors from university and private colleges and a group of current college students who will share advice and tips. Coordinator: Sita Powell

Indicator 3: Professional Development of Staff

Table 1 on the next page provides the current professional development plan that was presented to the Board of Education in August 2022. All activities and descriptions have been carried over from the previous report.

Table 1: Professional Development Schedule for 2022-23

Professional Development - 2022-2023 School Year				
ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	PROVIDER	TIME PERIOD	STAFF MEMBERS
Continued Equity Learning	Training and support for District Leadership Team	Nehemiah	School Year	District Equity Committee
Continued Equity Learning	Focus on foundational concepts and systems related to equity work	Various	Early Release & Staff Meetings	All Staff
District Level Systems	Continues implementation support based on Spring 2021 Data Inquiry Results	WI Rtl Center, CESA 2, and Local	School Year	District Office Building Leadership
Teacher Clarity	Improve upon systems to address teacher clarity: learning intentions, success criteria, formative assessments	WI Rtl Center, CESA 2, and Local	School Year	All Teaching Staff
LEO Program	Support staff well-being around focus, awareness, stability, and personal connections.	Life Ecology Organization	School Year	All Staff
Responsive Classroom	A student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline	Responsive Classroom	July 2022	Selected K-2 Staff
Assessment and Grading Task Force	Collaborative work to evaluate the District's grading policies and practices	Local	School Year	AGTF Team Members
PLC Institute	Professional Learning Communities	Solution Tree	August 1-3, 2022	34 Staff Members
LETRS Training	LETRS® (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling)	Lexia	School Year	20 Staff Members: Gr K, Reading Specs, K-3 SPED, Admin
Coplanning & Coteaching	Continued Implementation	Latricia Johnson, CESA 2	School Year	Coteaching Classroom Teachers
Coplanning & Coteaching	Continued Implementation	Peggy Black	School Year	Coteaching Classroom Teachers
Instructional Coaching Support	Coaching Support for New Instructional Coaches	CESA 2	School Year	3 Instructional Coaches
Viking Voyage Week	Various trainings	Various	August 16-19, 2022	Various Staff & Admin
New Mentor Training - YEAR 1	Redevelop core group of mentors for new teachers employed in the District	CESA 2	School Year	2 Elem Teachers & 2 HS Teachers
New Mentor Training - YEAR 2	Redevelop core group of mentors for new teachers employed in the District	CESA 2	School Year	1 Elem Teacher & 1 HS Teacher

The descriptions below provide further information on five of the more comprehensive and continued learning opportunities for our staff.

Coaching and Coteaching: Instructional coaches support teachers in reaching their goals and get better at what they do—teaching. However, instructional coaches, especially those who are new to the role, also need support in their growth. Therefore, over the past six months, our new secondary instructional coach, Staci Meister, and our two elementary math interventionists, Julie Jones and Amanda Sieja, have received support thru an intense summer training from Jim Knight Instructional Coaching Group and current monthly in-district coaching and check-ins from CESA 2. The cost and time put into these new positions is crucial as they affect the performance of many of our staff. Additionally, continuing these coaching positions past 2023/24—that are currently funded with ESSER funds—is now possible due to the passing of the recent referendum.

Coteaching has also been occurring for the past five years and continued support has been provided to those coteaching teams. Currently Latricia Johnson, from CESA 2, visits the Primary and Intermediate Centers on two back-to-back days each month. On the first day, she visits five different coteaching classrooms and observes the instruction; then on the second day, she debriefs with each team and provides next steps for their growth.

Teacher Clarity: All school buildings within the District have a focus on one key instructional practice: teacher clarity. In the simplest of terms, teacher clarity is teaching that is organized, intentional, and transparent. Student learning expectations are clear and the standards for progress and evaluation of that learning are clear for the students. Building principals and leadership teams have modeled and provided information, examples, and feedback to staff as they work to embed learning intentions and success criteria into their daily lessons. An example of a learning intention that would be visible and verbally shared with all students could be “Learn how to write an opinion essay to persuade an audience” while the success criteria (a stepping stone to get to the learning intention) could be “I can support my opinion with examples.” There is not a mystery to the end product/learning nor a mystery on the learning and outcomes needed to get there. While this may seem simple, students (and sometimes educators) focus more on the activities rather than the main learning goals. By bringing teachers back to think about the purpose of the activities and lessons, only then will our time with students be more focused and intentional.

K-5 Literacy Learning: For close to 12 months, members of the K-5 literacy committee have been acting on their interest to better understand current research around early literacy development and reading instruction. Approximately 20 teachers participated in two book studies over the summer. Their learning helped to guide the creation of selection criteria as the district investigates new K-2 foundational literacy resources. Additionally, 20 staff members (some overlapping with the book study participants) are committed to LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training. LETRS participants have approximately 50 hours of independent training (combination of readings and online learning) with four live, virtual training days. Each staff member will have invested 70-80 hours to this in-depth focus on early literacy foundational skills and practices. Their learning will also help guide a resource selection for the 2023/24 school year.

Equity Visioning: Last school year, members of the District Equity Committee developed a three-year plan for staff development around diversity, equity, and inclusion. This school year marks the first year of this plan. Staff learning centers on self-identity, determining bias, addressing discrimination, and combating hate speech. Figure 1 provides a quick overview of these training topics and outcomes.

Figure 1: Equity Visioning for Staff Development for the 2022/23 School Year



New Teacher Mentor Training: As of today, the District has 14 newly trained mentors (four in 18/19, two in 19/20, two in 20/21, two in 21/22, and four in 22/23). As part of state statute (and good practice), a mentor is matched with a new professional staff member for a period of three school years. Therefore, through the use of a Peer Review Mentoring Grant provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and through district funds, we have increased the number of trained mentor staff members.

Trainers commit to a very intensive two-year New Teacher Center Mentoring Program facilitated by CESA 2. Below are testimonials from Melissa Olmsted and Kelly Parker, two of our newer teacher mentors:

“When I was asked to be a mentor, I was very excited to learn how to help a new teacher grow and continue to learn new things myself. One of the ways I try and grow as an educator is to take time each day to reflect on what went well and how I could have improved my practice. The training I attended validated the importance of doing this not only as a new educator, but also as a veteran. I loved the discussions and opportunities to learn from teachers in other districts as well.

One interesting tidbit about Mount Horeb's mentor program that sets it aside from the rest is that our mentees get to observe us bi-monthly. I can't imagine not providing our newest teachers multiple opportunities to observe seasoned teachers. My mentee has been able to observe all subject areas as she has observed me monthly. While I can provide her feedback when I observe her, I think her being able to observe my classroom management styles, the various ways I give students opportunities to respond and my teaching practices is so beneficial. The trainers are very impressed that Mount Horeb has made this practice part of its mentor program.” - Melissa Olmsted

“I have very much enjoyed the New Teacher Mentor training so far. I was lucky as a new teacher to have a wonderful coach and mentor. This helped me to be a reflective thinker about my teaching practices. Being reflective and allowing myself to see my teaching as always growing and evolving has helped me to be a resilient teacher. Through this mentor training I am learning how to use coaching language to help my mentee do the same. I am hopeful that with continued practice with the tools the New Teacher Mentor training provides, I will be able to help my mentee be a reflective, resilient teacher as well.” - Kelly Parker

As a smaller district, we have to retain and nurture our own staff. The NTC Mentoring Program allows us to not only support our provisionally-licensed teachers but to also support the growth of our veteran staff.