

Middle School Success

July 19, 2016

Middle School Academic Team

Since 2013, Middle School Success has been a district priority. The middle school principals and the middle level team have partnered together to move Richland Two Middle Schools in a positive direction. The middle level team worked this year to support teachers and schools, and provide continual professional development in a variety of ways in order to meet the needs of **all** middle level teachers.

Here are few of the middle school successes for the 2015-16 school year:

Needs Assessments

In the fall of 2015, the middle level team, along with each school's administrative team partnered to observe in each middle school classroom in the District. These visits generated a Needs Assessment report which was provided to the school's administrative team. The middle level team worked with the administrative teams to devise a customized professional development plan for each school and noted areas for growth and further support. During March - May, an end of the year Needs Assessment was provided to note areas of improvement as well as areas of focus for the 2016-17 school year.

Professional Development

A multi-pronged approach to professional development was implemented to reach all middle school teachers in a variety of venues. Professional development was provided in small group grade level meetings during the school day. Each school scheduled meetings with the content specialists. Additional meetings and coaching sessions were scheduled with teachers to provide one-on-one time for more in-depth conversations as needed. Afterschool intense professional development sessions (Microbursts) were offered on topics that teachers requested to learn more about. Session topics included Teaching with Inquiry, Providing Feedback with Formative Assessment, Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge to Increase Classroom Rigor, Content Literacy in Science and Social Studies Classrooms, and Using Data to Impact Instruction. Nearly **1500 hours** of professional development was provided to Richland Two middle school teachers.

Teachers of Promise

The first cohort of **Teachers of Promise (TOP)** began in early 2016. Fifty-five middle level teachers were selected by the content specialist for their content knowledge and

leadership potential. The goal is to provide leadership and content training, while supporting teachers in their professional growth and creating a pathway for teacher-leaders. This cohort brings together teachers from different content areas, includes all middle schools, and includes diverse backgrounds-- all with the intent of growing these individuals as future team leaders, department leaders, and forthcoming district leaders. These teachers will work closely with the middle level team, and while they will “graduate,” they will continue to work closely with the middle level team to present at district and state inservices and provide professional development within their school setting.

National Reform Efforts

On June 30, 2015 middle school principals participated in a work session with Linda Allen, President of the National Forum for Middle Grades Reform for support and to provide resources.

Additionally, a grant in partnership with Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) was established during the early Spring with the assistance of Dr. Arlene Bakutes. Middle School teachers will train over the next three years in the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and the Math Design Collaborative (MDC). This reform effort is funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and through this Foundation’s research the SREB Design Collaboratives were one of the models designated to use in middle level classrooms. Training will begin in August and continue over the next three years. The middle school ELA and math content specialists will be trained as the Richland Two SREB coaches which will make these efforts sustainable for years to come.

Other Notable Successes

- Additional teacher positions were provided in the 2015-16 budget to E.L. Wright and Dent Middle Schools this past year to support struggling students. The teachers hired for these positions are strong in their content knowledge and have a heart for struggling students.
- The placement guidelines for content Honors classes and math pathways were revised to provide consistency across the content standards and maintain rigor.
- The Teaching and Learning Department worked with the New Teacher Center to bring instructional coaching training to the district content specialists and middle school Curriculum Effectiveness Specialists (CES) in the Teaching and Learning

Department. Eight sessions were provided to support content specialists and CES and to deepen their understanding of the coaching process.

- Over the course of the past year, a great deal of work has been done with the middle level curriculum. Standards have been unpacked, math and ELA scope and sequence documents have been provided, and this summer work in all content areas for grade level and Honors courses has begun in order to increase rigor and engage students in lessons that are stimulating, rigorous, and engaging. This work will be ongoing in order to revise and deepen content area curricula and strengthen middle level practices.
- Transition meetings were held between 5-6 grade teachers throughout the year as teacher groups met to determine the best ways to provide support for students and bridge the divide between elementary and middle schools. One significant meeting brought over 50 elementary and middle school math teachers together to discuss the decline in sixth grade math scores and to develop action steps.
- The middle level team worked with Curriculum Specialists to establish and support Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in middle schools.
- A GEAR-UP Grant, through the US Department of Education, targeted all eighth grade students at KMMS, DMS, ELWMS, SPMS, and LMS provided support with academic assistance, college information for parents, college visits, test taking skills, parenting workshops, mentoring, and summer academic programs to assist with the eighth-ninth grade transition.

Celebrations:

- The middle level team was recognized in June, 2016 at the Association of Middle Level Educators (AMLE) Leadership Conference for their development and support of teacher leaders.
- ELA teachers Christy Brown (BMS) and Kaitlin Manchester (MRMS) were named Honor Roll Teachers of the Year in 2016. Ms. Manchester was named the 2016 District Teacher of the Year.
- Muller Road Middle has provided the Richland School District Two Teacher of the Year for the past two years. Linda Whitcomb was the 2015 Richland School

District Two Teacher of the Year and Kaitlin Manchester is the 2016 Richland School District Two Teacher of the Year.

In closing, the middle level team is proud of the work and support that has been provided to Richland Two's seven middle schools this year. However, this work is not complete. This is the beginning, but we are greatly encouraged by the acceptance and response we receive on a daily bases from our teachers, our administrators and our district leaders. The middle level team would like to thank Dr. Hamm and the Richland School District Two School Board for your continued encouragement and support

Middle School Success Task Force

Having been identified as one of Dr. Hamm's and our school board's priorities, middle school success is vital to Richland Two's mission of preparing all students for success by providing meaningful, challenging, and engaging learning experiences. E.L. Wright Assistant Principal Malinda Taylor and Assistant Superintendent for Schools Keith Price were asked to co-chair a Middle School Success Task Force to examine, review, and explore current and best practices that help ensure success for middle schools and middle school students. With the assistance of Chief Instructional Officer Nancy Gregory and Director of Middle School Instruction Dr. Marsha Moseley, a committee was formed that consisted of four faculty members from each middle along with members from the middle school academic team. Each middle school principal served as a member of the committee from their school.

Prior to the first MSSTF meeting, committee members were given professional literature to review that included sources from *Breaking Ranks in the Middle (NASSP)*, *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents (NMSA)*, *The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (Schools-to-Watch)*, and *The Status of Programs and Practices in America's Middle Schools: Results from Two National Studies (AMLE)*. MSSTF leadership also met with Dr.'s Larry and Linda Allen (President of the National Forum on Middle Grades Reform) to gain their perspective on successful middle school priorities.

The committee was given four meeting dates throughout the year to discuss middle school data, best practices, beliefs, and priorities. Throughout the meetings, the following agenda items were presented, researched, discussed, and planned:

- Historical Data Trends in Richland Two
- Identifying best practices that exist in our middle schools
- Identifying best practices that do not exist in our middle schools
- Establishing belief statements for what middle school education should provide in Richland Two

- Identifying action steps to be taken across our district

At the conclusion of the MSSTF meetings, the seven middle school principals met with the MSSTF leadership to establish a vision for moving forward as a result of the work completed. Each principal now has a clear vision of what Richland Two believes should be provided to ensure middle school success and they are committed to moving their respective schools forward in this direction. Each principal, with the assistance of their school-level leadership team members, will commit to addressing one priority each year along this journey.

Middle School Success Task Force Beliefs

Scheduling/ Teaming/Grouping/Common Planning Time

We believe:

- PLCs should be expected to meet at least weekly for content-area planning and be “collaboration strong.”
- PLCs should have norms and SMART goals.
- Students should be intentionally placed in true, pure teams (with highest priority in 6th grade and decreasing priority in 7th, then 8th)(to assist with transitions)
- Protocols should be established for common planning.

Curriculum/Instructional Strategies/Student Placement/ Professional Development

We believe:

- Students should be grouped in a way to ensure their success.
- PD should be on-going at the district and school levels.
- Department heads need PD on leadership skills and hands on methods to better assist teachers with improving achievement.
- PD must be intentional and focused so that it can be truly applied and evaluated.
- TWCOR (technology, writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) strategies should be applied in all content areas.
- Curriculum maps/pacing guides are needed and should be reevaluated on a regular basis at the district level.

Non Instructional – Advisory/Advocacy/Clubs/Recess/Counseling/Discipline

We believe:

- Students should be exposed to a variety of programs to spark interest and engagement.
- Clear and consistent behavioral expectations, rules, regulations and consequences should be established
- All teachers should play a role in advocacy and advisory.

Teacher Support/Retention

We believe:

- Teachers' voice and autonomy matter.
- Teachers need emotional support.
- Mentorship is critical for retention especially during the first 3 years.
- In celebrating the humanity of teachers
- Time is needed to build collaborative relationships across schools and across the district which allows us to utilize each other's strengths.
- A positive school culture should intentionally focus on allowing teachers to build relationships with each other.
- Teachers need continuous and on-going feedback from administrators (non-evaluative).

Enrichment/Transition

We believe:

- All students deserve enrichment
- Enrichment should be a part of the regular school day and year-round
- Middle School staff needs PD on enrichment.
- Computerized programs do NOT remediate.
- Conversations should occur between elementary/middle and middle/high
- We should ask students what they need to transition smoothly, not make assumptions.

After the beliefs were finalized, a comparison study was performed to compare these items with those found in the literature shared at the beginning of the MSSTF's work. The following priorities are consistent with the beliefs established by the MSSTF as well as initiatives in place by the Teaching and Learning Department:

- High academic standards and expectations
- A focus on the development of the "whole" child (advisory)
- Sense of belonging and true teaming for students and teachers
- Multiple approaches to teaching and learning
- Administrators visiting classrooms regularly and providing quality feedback
- Professional Development is specific and intentional
- Socialization time should be included on the schedule
- Variety of opportunities for students to get involved in school beyond the classroom
- Remediation and support to help students meet rigorous expectations
- Focus on building positive relationships with students and decreasing poor behavior
- Use data to inform instruction and priorities
- Teacher/Student voice and shared leadership
- Professional collaboration
- Constant review to target improvement
- Celebrate student and faculty successes
- Vertical articulation and transition initiatives
- Mentoring program for new teachers

In conclusion, the Teaching and Learning Department will meet with each middle school's leadership team in late August/early September to review their test data, establish instructional focus areas and identify actions for support for the 2016-17 school year. With the shared beliefs of our middle school principals, along with the efforts and assistance of district staff, we believe that our middle schools are well on their way to achieving success and we look forward to sharing these successes with you in the future.