



*Memorandum*

To: Mr. Chamberlin and Members of the Board  
From: Michael Bessette  
Date: 4/5/10  
Re: Principal's Report on MSS Instruction

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Mr. Chamberlin and Members of the Board:

In a departure from our normal format regarding Principal's reports, we were tasked with providing you and the Board an overview on the progress of growth, implementation, and development of instructional practice at Maple Street School. In so doing, I would remind all parties that Maple Street's efforts this year to focus on three key areas have had a positive impact on instruction. You will recall that MSS has focused upon: 1) Climate Building / Refinement 2) Utilizing Technology to Support Curriculum / Instruction / and Assessment 3) Embracing and utilizing the Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework to obtain, analyze, and utilize data to support instruction.

MSS's climate work with Mainstreet Academix and with our own community has opened the door for higher levels of communication and trust among students and staff and between staff members themselves. Over the course of the past several years, our focus on creating understanding, trust, and a sense of community has opened doors for staff members, both literally and figuratively, to blend classrooms, co-teach children, and develop richer levels of interaction between all students. It is a weekly, if not daily experience for me to walk the halls and observe fourth and sixth grade students and teachers sharing a classroom experience. Often it is a sixth grader helping a fourth grader with a writing or social studies project, but sometimes it is a fourth grader leading the way. Regardless, opening the doors and allowing the teachers and students to interact with another serves both to tear down barriers and to improve instruction in our school, all while improving school climate in many ways. The addition of monthly student-centered assemblies and Community Clubs has also had a positive impact on these same issues.

At the individual teacher level, almost every TEP plan for MSS teachers this year involved personal learning goals to learn more about how to locate and use technology to develop curricula, improve assessments, increase student engagement, refine communications, and to expand learning opportunities. It has been a tremendous year for

the teachers in this regard. Much of this success was linked directly to having the support of the Technology Integration Specialist (formerly Jen Dexter who recently resigned) right in the classroom readily available to support teachers. This position was critical for teachers, as her ability to assist them in both setting up the technology and the training to use it made implementation far less time consuming, and thus more valued given the limited time available to all teachers on any given day. Examples of how her efforts have made an impact include: teachers creating podcasts, blogs and wiki's inside the school to share work and improve the peer editing process, teachers using JASON in all three grades to provide high level engaging science enrichment in an online format, increased use of laptop carts and projectors to utilize interactive web-based content in instruction, using AIMS-Web to improve data collection to support student assessment tracking and much more. Recent staff training for the District in the area of using technology to support high quality professional development independent learning experiences has inspired many of the MSS teachers to seek out even higher levels of technology use to support their own learning and their capacity to teach.

Over the last two to three years, teachers at MSS have been embracing the primary tenets of the Professional Learning Community (PLC). This model of thinking about instruction involves significant collaboration to support instruction. Within MSS, several teaming structures exist to ask critical questions regarding what kids know and are able to do. Teaching teams at each grade level collaborate to improve unit design and assessment, and collaborate to plan for the full spectrum of services for children. Concurrently, teams of administration, special education, behavior support, counseling, and health services meet weekly to review student referral data, health concerns, family issues and other significant factors for individual students to help develop plans and strategies to support the children and help them to be available for learning. Both of these teams are data driven, using data from X2, the Student Support Center, or from the classroom to determine whether intervention is needed. Currently, we have developed an intervention team called the "RTI Team" that meets to determine courses of intervention to support students in need of remediation.

As you walk the halls in MSS, I am confident that you would witness a wide variety of instructional techniques in motion. Whether you would see, as I did this morning, students creating power point presentations to support expository essays, a circuit station of small groups receiving a differentiated math lessons to reflect their skills as demonstrated in their pre-assessment, a circle talk regarding "current affairs" facilitated by the teacher, or a group of High School children coming to a fourth grade classroom to work with children and display their knowledge of static electricity with the younger generation, the results are amazing and our results solid. The questions asked of the kids go beyond simple recall, and more often than not extend their thinking into the valuable world of application and synthesis that is so important to critical thinking.

I am very proud of the teachers' efforts and know that they are using best practices to instruct the children.