

Annual Update: Milwood Middle School
Kalamazoo, Michigan

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May 2006

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Setting

Milwood Middle Schools is a 6-7-8 grade middle school located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This is the first year of existence as a magnet middle school with a focus on math, science and technology. This reconstituted school is currently in its fifth year of not making AYP and has is operating with 65% new staff. It has developed a middle school concept along with several structural and organizational changes.

Among the changes noted is the creation of a self-contained Student Services Center suite, and a technology infrastructure infusion into the instructional program. Additionally, the staff includes a full time literacy coach, math coach and technology support person.

Focus of Report

This report addresses two major questions.

1. What is the current situation at Milwood Middle School?
2. How can Milwood Middle School staff effectively meet the needs of the student population?

Organization of Report

This report is structured in the following manner:

- I. Data Collection
 - A. Test data
 - B. Perception survey
 - C. Discipline referrals
 - D. Structural and organizational changes
 - E. Classroom walk-throughs
 - F. Staff interviews
- II. Interpretation and Analysis
- III. Recommendations
- IV. Conclusions

Data Collection

Test data

| | | | | |
|-----------|--|--|--|--|
| MEAP ELA | Percent of 7 th graders at the proficient level 2002-03 | Percent of 7 th graders at the proficient level 2003-04 | Percent of 7 th graders at the proficient level 2004-05 | Percent of 7 th graders at the proficient level 2005-06 |
| Total | 33% | 27% | 45% | 44% |
| MEAP ELA | | | | Percent of 8 th graders at the proficient level 2005-06 |
| Total | | | | 34% |
| MEAP Math | | | | Percent of 7 th graders at the proficient level 2005-06 |
| Total | | | | 27% |
| MEAP Math | Percent of 8 th graders at the proficient level 2002-03 | Percent of 8 th graders at the proficient level 2003-04 | Percent of 8 th graders at the proficient level 2004-05 | Percent of 8 th graders at the proficient level 2005-06 |
| Total | 29% | 41% | 41% | 26% |

While the data indicate a growth in ELA at grade 7 and a drop in math at grade 8, neither conclusion, in our opinion are valid. Given that Milwood has a different student population than was previously measured and that the data is representative of 6th and 7th grade instruction, this data needs to be considered as baseline data and should be used for planning purposes only.

Perception Survey

A perception survey was conducted with the staff at the beginning of April 2006. The data from this survey indicate strengths in the following areas:

- Collaborative decision making (1.6)
- A belief that all students will succeed (2.5)
- A more student-centered environment (2.7)
- Data is used for decision making (4.2, 6.1)
- The school is organized in an open and flexible manner (7.1)

The perception data further indicate a need for growth in the following areas:

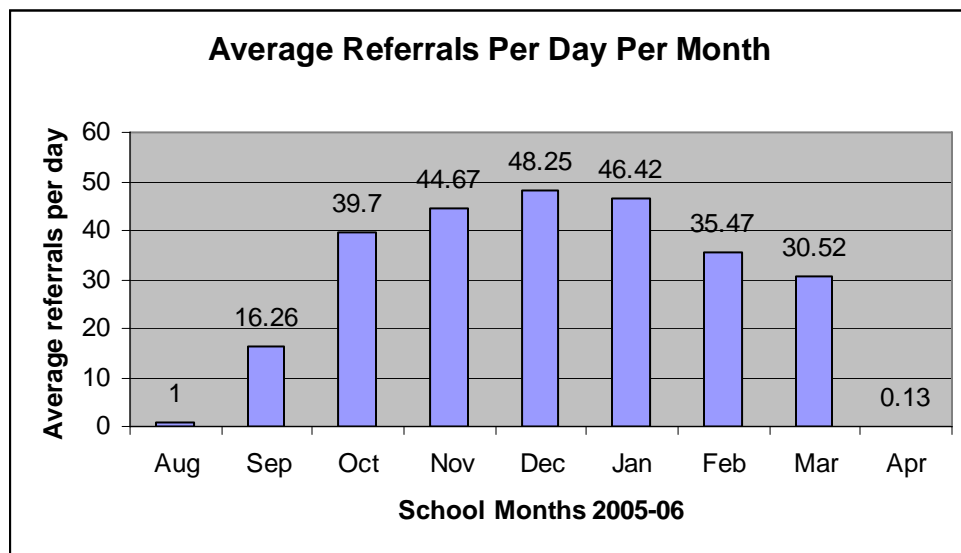
- Communication of vision (1.1)
- Common student behavioral expectations (2.4)
- A clear written curriculum (3.1)
- The alignment of instruction (4.1)

In general, a positive attitude and a feeling of hope and progress is projected throughout the survey.

The complete results of the April 2006 survey, along with the May 2005 survey have been attached to this report. The respondent populations for each survey are different and therefore, should be examined as stand alone information and not used for comparison purposes.

Referral Data

The following is a graph of referral information collected from the SWIS system in April 2006. The following chart suggests several questions for thought. Why are referrals dropping? Is it the result of improvement in operation of the SSC? Is there improved communication among staff? Or teams? Is this indicative of all teachers/teams or just some teachers and teams?



Structural and Organizational Changes

The school has located all student support services, including the public safety officer, counselors, assistant principal, in-school suspension and all other related services, into a common area called the Student Services Center. The purpose of this center is to,

provide more immediate support when needed, increase communication between services and to track behaviors, referrals and interventions.

Title 1 funding has been used to provide two teaching coaches, one in math and the other in literacy. These coaches provide curricular and instructional support to all teachers in order to improve student performance. The coaches model lessons, conduct professional development, manage assessment information and data, provide guidance to staff, and instructional leadership support for the principal.

Classroom Walkthroughs

The classroom walk-throughs revealed a high degree of student engagement, integration of technology, cooperative learning, use of learning centers, use of specific instructional strategies and evidence of inclusion.

Staff Interviews

We interviewed approximately 22 teachers. The interviews revealed the following common themes.

Positive accomplishments:

- Literacy Night
- Improvement in the lunchroom
- Collaboration
- High degree of success among some teams
- Tremendous passion and a strong belief in making positive things happen
- Increased acknowledgement of success of kids

Expressed concerns:

- Student behavior
- Unclear curriculum
- Process and procedure in the Student Services Center
- Planning time
- Communication
- Regarding intolerance and cultural differences

Interpretation and Analysis

Student Services Center

“When you close a school you undo all of the existing systems. In the beginning you need to take time and energy to re-build every system”. Once the school year began, there was little time to design the systems; consequently it was a case of adding and patching on-the-go. For example, look at the student services center. It is an outstanding

concept, however, there was little time for thorough team planning before school started and once school started, consequently the staff began by imprinting old behavior and operations onto the new center leaving staff wondering why kids behaviors were not improving and just what was going on in the student services center. Getting the staff of the SSC to operate efficiently as a team takes time and concentrated effort. Efficient and effective communication is important among members of the team and always between the team and staff; as well as, the team and students and their parents. It has taken most of the year for the SSC team to recognize and modify practices to create a quality Student Services Center.

Student Behavior

Staff identified four goals for student behavior at the beginning of the year: responsibility, caring, respect and honesty. These are all positive attributes but they lack specificity of actions. Goals are essential, but they need to be broken down into observable behaviors in order to achieve them. Staff members were mixed in their approach toward the goals because the expectations were not clearly understood for implementation at the instructional level. Consequently, people interpreted them differently and addressed in a variety of ways. So, students did not get a strong united message on expected behaviors, language or dress.

Staff Norms

There was also a lack of clarity among some staff members about the operational expectations of middle school. The school year began with approximately 65% of the staff at Milwood coming from other schools and/or school districts. This lack of prior common experiences created an immediate deficit. Teachers were confronted with uncommon expectations, differences in teaching styles and methodologies. There was also an expectation for full inclusion when some staff members lacked an understanding of how teaming should operate for this purpose.

Relationships

The staff didn't have time to build meaningful relationships or common understandings among themselves; consequently it has taken most of the year for relationships to emerge among staff. People greatly appreciate the socialization activities sponsored by Mr. Campbell as an opportunity for getting together and getting to know each other. On the student level relationships are crucial for student learning. The research is very solid regarding the importance of student/teacher relationships and learning. There is also a connection with student behavior. If discipline is managed solely from a perspective of rules without the connection of a relationship, students usually will not cooperate. The classrooms in which personal relationships exist show a different, more positive behavior pattern among the children.

Curriculum

The Michigan Department of Education expects all public schools to teach to the Grade Level Content Expectations that are based on the Michigan Curriculum Framework. This document serves as the guide for all public schools in the determination of curricular decisions, and these expectations are assessed annually by the MEAP in grades 3-8. As a

result of the Kalamazoo Promise, a number of staff members expressed confusion over the purpose of their instruction. The question for some is, “Do I teach for the Promise, or do I teach for the MEAP.” Still another source of confusion has been the adoption of the Connected Math Program, and the new science program. New programs and new adoptions and the instructional focus take time and commitment, but the intended expectations must be clearly stated and understood by everyone involved.

Instruction – How we teach

Middle School Students respond best to active engagement. Working through social/cooperative learning groups, they will respond to clear expectations, but they must be taught the rules for successful engagement in these groups. Once those rules are understood and used, middle school students are capable of working toward clearly defined learning expectations. The use of learning centers, cooperative learning, project based learning, virtual field trips and other hands-on experiences are all approaches that can result in successful engagement of middle school students. No matter what methodology a teacher uses, they must clearly define and teach the behavioral expectations they need for productive classroom management and they must create healthy relationships with their students and colleagues.

Assessment and Grading

Teachers report that they are using a wide range of assessment strategies to evaluate student learning. However, they also report that grading is closely determined by student effort and behavior.

Diversity

Working in a school population that is diverse ethnically, socially, physically, academically and culturally demands a high level of modeled tolerance and understanding by all staff members and adults. The differences that exist among students who are brought together because of attendance boundaries and choice must be directly recognized and addressed through thoughtful instruction. To ignore these differences is to condone all aspects of prejudice and discrimination.

Recommendations

1. The Student Services Center is an excellent approach to coordinating the many services available. Therefore, a plan for communicating the programs, processes and responsibilities needs to be developed and implemented.
2. Staff and students need to know how to access services and who is responsible for what service. Additionally, a feedback/communication system needs to be established for keeping staff in the loop, and a system needs to be established for internal communication within the center to keep all members aware of actions.
3. Norms for student and staff need to be established. The existing goals, responsibility, caring, respect and honesty leave a great deal to interpretation by students and staff.

Norms need to be established by the staff, and they need to clearly define an observable action and/or behavior.

Example:

| <u>DO</u> | + | <u>WHAT</u> |
|-----------|---|---|
| Speak | | Using school appropriate (Formal register) language |
| Walk | | On the right side of the hall |

These agreed upon actions must then be taught by every teacher in every class and reviewed each day until students began to demonstrate them.

4. Many of the staff are new to middle school and there have been many changes in materials consequently, there is a great deal of confusion about curriculum. Even though the District has an established, written curriculum, it is not understood by all. If student performance is a priority then the written curriculum needs to be taught. The only way this curriculum can be taught is if all teachers have it in their hands and lessons are designed around that curriculum. Textbooks and other materials are not the curriculum; rather they are merely tools and resources. Therefore, it is essential that all teachers have a copy of the written curriculum they are expected to teach.
5. Instruction not only needs to be directly aligned with the written curriculum, the outcomes for the instruction need to be clearly stated to the student. These outcomes need to be shared in student friendly language and in behavioral terms. Much like the norms, if the learner does not know what they should be able to do or know at the end of the lesson, then it is unclear if the desired learning is taking place. Just because something is taught it does not mean it was learned. The outcome for every lesson needs to be shared with students in writing on the board at the beginning of the lesson, and teachers need to be able to explain the connection of that outcome to the grade level content expectations if asked.
6. The assessment of student learning needs to focus on the outcomes of learning not on effort. If giving a grade on effort is important, then it should be identified as a separate grade. Grading the student in science, for instance, need to reflect the scientific information learned and demonstrated by the student.
7. Staff needs to have training in the use of accommodation strategies for the wide variety of learners. Collaboration, conflict management skills, the application of Ruby Payne's work on poverty and Kunjufu's work on the African-American students are necessary for dealing with the diversity in the school population.
8. Time and processes need to be established for staff to learn to become reflective, self-directed learners before they can expect students to be self-directed learners. The class that many of the staff is taking together is a positive step toward developing common purposes, processes and outcomes for reflection. This type of activity needs to continue.

9. Effective team meetings need to occur with the following criteria:
- A team leader needs to be selected
 - A schedule for these meetings needs to be established
 - Every meeting needs to have a focused agenda
 - Written minutes need to be kept and shared with the principal and the math and literacy coaches.
 - Planning time for these meetings needs to be held sacred.
- (The MI-MAP toolkit is an excellent resource for providing templates for agenda and minutes that will keep meetings focused and action orientated.)

Teams also need to be trained in the skills and processes of collaboration, communication and conflict management.

Conclusion

There are many fine things happening at Milwood including the use of coaches as support to the instructional program, the infusion of technology focused on improving student performance, the creation of the Student Services Center and a strong emphasis on project-based experiential learning for students.

There is a great deal of optimism and energy among the staff members. They are coming together as a team and creating a school focused on student learning and high student achievement. While Milwood still has problems with student behavior, there is progress being made. By carefully focusing time and energy on the creation of norms for students, structuring team planning time to facilitate problem-solving and management, improving communication at all levels and clarifying the processes, procedures and communication from the Student Services Center, Milwood will become an outstanding student-centered learning community.