

# ALL FORWARD

## STRATEGIC PATHWAYS FOR LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT



**Overview:** The 2017-18 school year marks the third year of implementation of the District's strategic plan, *All Forward*. The plan continues to shape decision-making in nearly every aspect of our work and has led to a number of programmatic enhancements in recent years, from expanded computer science offerings to report card revisions. One of many highlights from last school year was the introduction of "unit upgrades," a process by which teachers enhance learning units through peer collaboration and review and closer alignment with the goals of the strategic plan. The *2016-17 Strategic Plan Annual Report* is located at [www.lmsd.org](http://www.lmsd.org) and details the progress on the plan.

**What's New:** The following is a list of explorations that are being implemented and/or expanded this school year. Some are next steps in work that began in 2016-17. Others are pilot programs that will be studied for possible District-wide implementation.

## K-12



### **Genius Hour**

Initially piloted at BCMS for sixth graders, "genius hour" will be expanded to the elementary schools in 2017-18. Genius Hour is derived from an approach by Google and other innovative companies whereby employees are given time to work on projects of their choosing in order to explore personal interests and passions. Translated to the classroom, teachers provide students with opportunities for choice in order to explore their own passions, encourage creativity, and celebrate their unique voice.



### **Student Voice**

One of the key tenets of *All Forward* is providing expanded opportunities for student voice. Following a series of powerful conversations with randomly-selected students (grades 5-12) over the last 12 months, the District is working to implement a reliable, streamlined system for gathering and making use of student feedback on a variety of topics of interest ranging from student choice in learning to mental health and well-being.



### **Digital Portfolios**

The concept of a cumulative Lower Merion Digital Portfolio (essentially a record of student work from the time they enter LMSD until graduation) is rooted in the belief that cross-curricular interdisciplinary connections and thoughtful reflection on student work over time is a meaningful way to evidence learning and growth. This year, the District will explore a digital tool for portfolio creation and determine if and how the practices of portfolio creation could be included on revised report cards. Teachers will be provided with learning opportunities related to using digital portfolios to guide writing instruction and cultivating reflection and inquiry.



### **Computer Science**

The past few years have seen the introduction of elementary coding programs, the approval of a new high school course focused on App Design, and K-12 professional learning with Code.org trainers. A focus of 2017-18 will be on curriculum revision, specifically developing a clear articulation of technology, computing, and coding skills expected of students in elementary and middle school. Curriculum revision at the elementary level will include coding experiences for all students across multiple disciplines. The middle level curriculum will be revised to include computer science and coding in all three grades. A high school level priority will be to increase enrollment in computer science offerings among female and minority students, who locally and nationally are underrepresented in computer science courses and the professional field.

## Elementary



### **Report Cards**

The District will pilot a new, standards-based elementary report card this year that will provide greater detail and expanded narrative about student performance on academic standards as well as problem-solving skills, such as strategic reasoning, perseverance, and creativity. The report card identifies each student's level of progress with regard to those standards, areas of strength and areas of growth. The pilot will begin with fourth graders this school year.

## Middle School



### **Student-Led Leadership Conference**

Leadership development will be the focus of a student-led conference involving a cross-section of middle school students. The conference will nurture leadership capacity on an individual and communal level through individual self-reflection, peer-to-peer collaboration, character development exercises, and the development of student voice. The program will help build a sense of school community and provide students the opportunity to connect with a diverse group of youth leaders and peer role models.



### **Restorative Practices**

A District team has been meeting regularly to develop opportunities to grow and support Restorative Practices at the four secondary schools. Restorative Practices is a philosophical approach to building and sustaining a school culture founded on relationships between and among staff and students. Once focused on building relationships, schools are better positioned to proactively address challenging behavior. In this sense, interactions between students and adults are characterized by mutual respect and interactions that are potentially negative are met with the mindset to repair any harm that has been done and to restore the relationship between the individuals involved. This philosophy aligns closely with the Responsive Classroom model established at our elementary schools.

## High School



### **Interdisciplinary Programs**

Drawing on the success and popularity of LMSD's middle school interdisciplinary programs, the District has begun to develop interdisciplinary pilot programs at the high schools that will encompass four or more courses bridging the humanities and natural and social sciences. The programs will enable learners to study overarching themes, questions, or problems using the different approaches, theories, and methods highlighted in the various disciplines. The experience would include data gathering, research trips, travel opportunities, community based partnerships, artistic productions, and/or intensive laboratory activity. The goal is to implement an initial pilot offering for the 2018-19 school year.



### **Writing Center**

The District is moving forward in enhancing training, support and feedback for student writers. This includes the establishment of a Peer-Based Writing Fellows Writing Center at each high school. This summer, the District began identifying a writing center director for each school and training a group of talented student writers who will serve as a resource to peers in the writing center. The program is based on various models of writing centers at other academic institutions and scholarly research.

