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PREPARED BY: LEADERSHIP TEAM

**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE 2016-17 YEAR**



Annual Report



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STRATEGIC PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2014, Lower Merion School District launched a new strategic plan, created with the input of thousands of stakeholders, including students, staff, parents, alumni and community members. Titled **All Forward**, the plan embraces a collective, intentional, and positive approach to change. Rather than a tactical guide with step-by-step instructions, the plan was designed to serve as the District's strategic compass for the next five years and beyond.

During the plan's development, a steering committee of community members established five "bold statements of strategic intent" to provide the framework of the plan. Now that the plan has been approved and we are transforming words into action, the bold statements serve as our strategic pathways: Transformative Curriculum, Redefining Success, Student-Driven Schools, Commitment to Professional Learning, and Spirit of Community. These pathways indicate our direction as a school community and represent a shift from where we are today in how we define student success, develop curriculum, support professional learning, engage students, and partner with the community. The intent of the plan is not to solve a specific problem or fix a failure. Rather, it serves as a necessary next step forward in our evolution as one of the finest public school systems in the United States.

We, as a community, have begun to transform **All Forward** into action by embedding the tenets of the plan into our daily work and through the creation of task-oriented teams studying innovative practices and strategies that will inform our future work. Systemic change has not occurred quickly. These efforts have and will continue to take time, reflection, and revision. As the plan evolves, we will remain committed to providing updates and ongoing opportunities for feedback.

The plan and the wonderful work that has been done represent our commitment to the children of Lower Merion and Narberth now and forever. Thank you for your support of our schools. We welcome your feedback and partnership as we continue to implement our strategic plan. *All Forward!*





We encourage feedback on any aspect of this document or any suggestions you may have in helping us realize our strategic plan. Please contact us at AllForward@lmsd.org.



READER’S GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

This document provides:

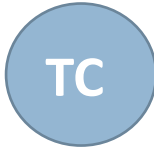
- **Part 1:** A summary of the five strategic pathways of the **All Forward** Strategic Plan and their accompanying strategies. These summaries have guided our implementation efforts and the work of our pathway teams.
- **Part 2:** This section of the report provides an overview of the 2016-2017 work that has been accomplished by the committed professionals who have invested time as representative members of our pathway teams. Within this section, each pathway team’s exploration is summarized together with recommendations for future action. Through the use of color-coded signals, it is noted how the work intersects with other pathways as well as identifies the grade level applicability. For example, “Genius Hour” was an exploration connected to the Student-Driven Schools Pathway Team, but is associated with Transformative Curriculum (“TC”), Professional Learning (“PL”), and Spirit of Community (“SC”). The work is also targeted for implementation at the K-5 level. The table below is an example of the “key” provided for each exploration.

Exploration	“Genius” Hour			
Originated from	Student Driven Schools			
Additional Pathway Connections				

- **Part 3:** Identification of team members and contributors to the development and implementation of **All Forward**.



PATHWAYS CREATED IN 2014



TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULUM

Lower Merion School District offers a transformative interdisciplinary curriculum that is student-driven and fosters innovation and positive risk-taking. It transcends Standards, is inquiry-based, and connects the classroom to the world. Our curriculum encompasses diverse perspectives, promotes global awareness, and makes use of culturally responsive teaching and learning practices. This dynamic, adaptable curriculum provides vertically and horizontally aligned curricular experiences, ensuring every student learns from the connections across subject areas and receives a comprehensive and balanced education. Subject material is relevant to the world our children will enter in college and as adults. Innovation is the rule and not the exception.

Why: Shared Vision for Transformative Curriculum

- Expanded curricular experiences outside of the school day
- Students with well-developed skills that transfer to multiple and novel situations
- Students with excellent global awareness and cultural competency
- Students with strong teamwork and complex problem-solving skills
- Revised and expanded curriculum that is vertically and horizontally-aligned and schedules to supports this

What: Foundational Shift

We will shift from content area silos to a connected curriculum that prepares students to transfer knowledge and thinking strategies across disciplines. Our commitment to this will drive scheduling. We will shift traditional structures in the school day and school year to flexible and fluid time periods that allow students to explore relevant content and interests without the barriers of class periods, walls or buildings.

How: Strategy Implementation Cycle (a process)

- **Phase 1-** Identify bright spots; conduct research (e.g. ask questions, read, dialogue and identify learning journeys)
- **Phase 2-** Study bright spots; analyze research in order to propose prototypes; determine professional learning needs
- **Phase 3-** Replicate bright spots in different settings; carry out prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 4-** Monitor, make adjustments/corrections and evaluate effectiveness of bright spots and prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 5-** Expand bright spots and prototypes into broader use; follow-up and expand professional learning to build capacity

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- **Strategy:** Flexible, fluid scheduling and calendar
 - **Strategy:** Expand curricular experiences outside of the school day
 - **Strategy:** Embed an inquiry-based process approach across curriculum; thinking within one discipline (e.g. historians or scientists) transfers to others
 - **Strategy:** Infuse literacy, science, technology, engineering, arts and math across the curriculum in all grade levels
 - **Strategy:** Apply a social justice lens to themes in the curriculum
 - **Strategy:** Embed culturally-proficient teaching practices
 - **Strategy:** Create incremental service learning opportunities for students leading to a year-long capstone project
 - **Strategy:** Create opportunities for all LMSD students to engage in learning with international students



REDEFINING SUCCESS

Lower Merion School District’s definition of success incorporates creativity, critical thinking, innovation, and a love of learning for each and every child to encourage globally aware and engaged students. We reach far beyond standardized test scores, embracing and celebrating the many ways in which students demonstrate individual growth. We will transform how we define, measure, and report student achievement with a focus on each student’s individualized growth and mastery in areas that extend beyond traditional academic indicators.

Why: Shared Vision for Redefining Success

- Standardized testing reduced
- Achievement, equity, access and opportunity gaps eliminated
- Consistently strong academic performance as measured by traditional indicators
- Students report higher levels of social, emotional and physical well-being
- Students report feeling empowered to take safe academic risks
- Multiple paths to success are valued

What: Foundational Shift

We will transform how we define, measure and report student achievement with a focus on each student’s individualized growth and mastery in areas that extend beyond traditional academic indicators.

How: Strategy Implementation Cycle (a process)

- **Phase 1-** Identify bright spots; conduct research (e.g. ask questions, read, dialogue and identify learning journeys)
- **Phase 2-** Study bright spots; analyze research in order to propose prototypes; determine professional learning needs
- **Phase 3-** Replicate bright spots in different settings; carry out prototypes; engage in professional learning
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- **Phase 5-** Expand bright spots and prototypes into broader use; follow-up and expand professional learning to build capacity

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- **Strategy:** Create protocols that measure development (e.g. social, emotional and physical wellness), creativity, critical thinking, love of learning and innovation so that growth is more broadly measured
 - **Strategy:** Re-examine grading practices so that growth is reported more comprehensively
 - **Strategy:** Expand use of assessment protocols (e.g. portfolios) so that practices are balanced; include more self-reflection, embedded formative assessment, criterion-based measurement (e.g. rubrics) and performance-based measures (e.g. create presentations and complete projects) into curriculum
 - **Strategy:** Transform graduation requirements and the distribution of courses and experiences



STUDENT-DRIVEN SCHOOLS

Lower Merion School District students engage in navigating their own learning and growth in close partnership with our professionals. We create an environment where students value self-reflection and inquiry and play a central role in identifying their passions and achieving their goals. We nurture and celebrate the individual strengths of our students and help them to develop competencies that ensure their success beyond the LMSD experience.

Why: Shared Vision for Student-Driven Schools

- Students with self-confidence and resilience
- Students who are reflective
- Strong student satisfaction and outcomes
- Variety of valued and celebrated student post-graduate pathways

What: Foundational Shift

We will adjust our system from one characterized by heavily-prescribed requirements to one that affords more self-directed goal setting and learning.

How: Strategy Implementation Cycle (a process)

- **Phase 1-** Identify bright spots; conduct research (e.g. ask questions, read, dialogue and identify learning journeys)
- **Phase 2-** Study bright spots; analyze research in order to propose prototypes; determine professional learning needs
- **Phase 3-** Replicate bright spots in different settings; carry out prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 4-** Monitor, make adjustments/corrections and evaluate effectiveness of bright spots and prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 5-** Expand bright spots and prototypes into broader use; follow-up and expand professional learning to build capacity

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- **Strategy:** Foster a growth mindset at every level
 - **Strategy:** Develop a protocol for student goal-setting and self-reflection
 - **Strategy:** Provide students with developmentally-appropriate opportunities to pursue differentiated areas of interest within a framework of a given lesson or subject
 - **Strategy:** Provide opportunities for more student voices to be heard across the District and in the classroom
 - **Strategy:** Expand enrichment opportunities for students to pursue curricular interests
 - **Strategy:** Create schedules that increase opportunities for students to be flexibly grouped



COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Lower Merion School District is a community that values educators and the critical role they play in ensuring our students’ success. We trust our professionals and seek to support their perpetual growth and development through collaborative professional learning opportunities rooted in self-reflection and inquiry. We believe in providing resources to staff that encourage a culture of engagement, innovation, and exploration.

Why: Shared Vision for Professional Learning

- Results-oriented professional growth
- High educator engagement and trust
- High student achievement and well-being data

What: Foundational Shift

We will transform our approach to professional learning from a top-down model to one that honors and harnesses our educators’ collective wisdom. We will provide venues across disciplines and buildings for professionals to collaborate, explore and innovate in order to sustain their continual growth and support the intended outcomes of this plan.

How: Strategy Implementation Cycle (a process)

- **Phase 1-** Identify bright spots; conduct research (e.g. ask questions, read, dialogue and identify learning journeys)
 - **Phase 2-** Study bright spots; analyze research in order to propose prototypes; determine professional learning needs
 - **Phase 3-** Replicate bright spots in different settings; carry out prototypes; engage in professional learning
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 - **Phase 5-** Expand bright spots and prototypes into broader use; follow-up and expand professional learning to build capacity
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- **Strategy:** Develop a coordinated professional learning plan that includes more collaboration (e.g. to reflect, to inquire, to research, to implement, to evaluate, to determine implications for future practice) and is more educator-directed
 - **Strategy:** Embed professional learning opportunities during the school day
 - **Strategy:** Build the capacity of educator-leaders
 - **Strategy:** Revise the professional learning calendar and its scheduling
 - **Strategy:** Provide opportunities for educators and parents and guardians to learn together to ensure positive outcomes for each student



SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

Lower Merion School District takes pride in being a central part of the community. We value the diverse, dynamic talents of every member of our community and their enduring support for public education. We honor this spirit through consistent outreach and the creation of meaningful relationships to promote experiential learning, ongoing service, and engagement that will strengthen and support the student experience during the LMSD years and beyond.

Why: Shared Vision for Spirit of Community

- Students have meaningful internship, service or community exploration experience
- Community highly values LMSD schools
- Partnerships aligned to District’s mission increase
- Growth of alumni network and high alumni engagement (e.g. giving, social media participation, volunteerism)
- New revenue generated from alumni fund and business partnerships aligned to District’s mission

What: Foundational Shift

We will transform our approach to community outreach from one that is less coordinated to one that strategically leverages and maximizes community resources to strengthen our schools.

How: Strategy Implementation Cycle (a process)

- **Phase 1-** Identify bright spots; conduct research (e.g. ask questions, read, dialogue and identify learning journeys)
- **Phase 2-** Study bright spots; analyze research in order to propose prototypes; determine professional learning needs
- **Phase 3-** Replicate bright spots in different settings; carry out prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 4-** Monitor, make adjustments/corrections and evaluate effectiveness of bright spots and prototypes; engage in professional learning
- **Phase 5-** Expand bright spots and prototypes into broader use; follow-up and expand professional learning to build capacity

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- **Strategy:** Create a strategic alumni development program (student, parent, teacher, administrator) to maintain and maximize life-long connections
 - **Strategy:** Create on-going revenue producing learning opportunities and experiences for graduates, parents, and family members
 - **Strategy:** Launch business-development role to explore alternate revenue streams for District and identify and maximize strategic partnerships
 - **Strategy:** Build reciprocal school-community partnerships that maximize and value the resources of our diverse community
 - **Strategy:** Audit our current communication practices and identify opportunities to strengthen practices moving forward
 - **Strategy:** Create opportunities for students, families and community members to successfully transition into our schools
 - **Strategy:** Engage a broader audience for District events and activities










STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2017 EXPLORATIONS

Throughout the 2016-2017 school year, each pathway team met regularly throughout the year to strategize the ways that the pathway teams could operationalize ideas that have been generated as a result of professional dialogue. Many ideas emerged through these discussions. Also, the pathway teams had specific subcommittees designated to investigate and research several ideas, programmatic changes, or philosophical pivots that fell within their purview. Some of these ideas resulted in actionable steps for the District to pursue, others call for further investigation, and others resulted in a recommendation to not move forward. The summaries of many of these topics are described below.

These summaries are not intended to comprehensively capture all of the ways that the Strategic Plan has impacted our thinking and planning, but rather provide clarity and report progress on some of the specific ideas that are being explored. The pathways were not designed with the intent of working in isolation. The most impactful decisions that emerge from the plan will be naturally influenced by all the pathways. However, for the sake of clarity within this document, the explorations will be listed individually by the pathway from which they originated. The connections between other pathways will be indicated as part of the summary of progress.

Part of the operationalization of the plan includes forwarding recommendations to what we have called the "Go Team." This committee includes representatives from all ten buildings and takes recommendations from the pathway teams to help create actionable steps to implement a proposed idea and generate a timeline to help facilitate this process.



Exploration	Transfer/Transformative Goals
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	      

Background

Over the summer of 2016, a group of 26 teachers from all levels joined the District administration and worked closely with our Strategic Planning consultants for two days deeply exploring and operationalizing our curriculum to help it become transformative. As a point of focus, the group created a set of *transformative goals* that serve to drive the experience we expect to provide for our students. Transfer goals, or what we have referred to as transformative goals, are long-term in nature, emphasize independent application both in and out of school, and establish purpose and relevance for students. A protocol was created for teachers and administrators to reflect on these goals and assess the extent to which they are included in the curriculum across grade and discipline.

Current Situation








Transformative goals are classified into three areas (personal, cultural, and global). These goals drive curriculum work that occurs throughout the school year, including serving as the driver for the instructional units that every teacher in the District is upgrading and delivering.

Transformative Goals		
Within and beyond the school walls, learners independently seek to:		
Personal	Cultural	Global
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and develop personal interests, inquiries, and passions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Navigate through diverse sources and perspectives to reach discerning and thoughtful understandings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use processes (e.g., design thinking, creative problem solving, and systems thinking) to develop solutions and to understand the role of failure in learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Craft communication through choice of mode(s) of expression, strategic use of evidence, and command of language to reach intended audience(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for self and others by drawing on compassion and courage to speak up for what’s right and just. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate challenging contemporary global and local issues by pursuing questions or lines of thinking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set learning goal(s) that are pursued and evaluated until the goal(s) are realized or new ideas emerge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share stories, ideas, and points of view while engaging others to think interdependently and act collectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make informed choices that support social, emotional and personal health and well-being.

Recommendation

The Transformative Goals will serve as a driving force behind curriculum and instructional design as we look to continue to provide students with curricular experiences that are aligned with the strategic plan fostering innovation and positive risk taking. In addition it is recommended that the Transformative Goals become more prominent in our communication and voice as we share the various aspects of our curriculum and our students’ experiences.



Exploration	Intentional Upgrades of Instructional Units
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	      

Background

Upon completion and distribution of the transformative goals, members of the strategic plan leadership team worked with the Strategic Planning consultants to find ways to help bring the goals to fruition for each of our students. The Go Team, which consists of teacher leaders and building administrative from all ten schools across the District, strategized ways for all District teachers to use the transformative goals to upgrade an instructional unit (that is, taking a unit that they teach and making it better by aligning it with the Transformative Goals) to be delivered to students and shared with their colleagues. Staff development time was dedicated to allow for collaboration and planning of the delivery of these units. Time was also allotted within each building for staff to receive feedback from their peers on their unit designs. Working drafts were submitted to all building principals in January.







Current Situation

All District teachers continue to work collaboratively to plan and implement the unit upgrades in their classrooms. Delivery of instruction of each unit upgrade provides our students with several experiences that specifically focus and address the skills that are included in the transformative goals. Teachers are submitting final documentation of their unit upgrade by the end of the year. This documentation includes a narrative reflection of delivery of the unit. Reflection is a natural and necessary part of the instructional design process and teachers are documenting it in a way that supports sharing and collaboration of the Intentional Unit Upgrades with their colleagues. Both the unit design and narrative reflection will be warehoused for all staff to access.

Recommendation

As the transformative goals will continue to drive our curriculum and instructional design, we recommend that staff work to further enhance their instructional units to include an assessment review and upgrade in conjunction with the work on assessment design that is occurring across the District and imbedded in our professional learning plan for the 2017-18 school year. In addition, we recommend that as part of their professional goals for the 2017-2018 school year, teachers should consider identifying a peer’s Intentional Unit Upgrade to review from which they will draw ideas or concepts to apply in another unit to further align our instruction to the transformative goals.



Exploration	K-12 Computer Science Curriculum
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	     

Background

The demand for computer science skills continues to grow worldwide. As a District, we are committed to finding ways to grow both the number of experiences and the ways in which students are exposed to coding and computer science and to provide avenues for students to further their skills after and in light of that initial exposure.

The interconnections between the K-12 computer science curriculum revisions, the on-going inquiry-based work of makerspace and maker mentality, and the professional learning pathway are evident and best support this work when considered together.

Current Situation








Coding occurs in pockets with certain teachers at the elementary level, and sometimes with students from the high school traveling to the elementary schools to facilitate discrete student experiences. Ozobots and Bee-Bots have also been used at the various grade levels to introduce students to the basics of coding. At the middle level, explicit and systematic opportunities to learn about computer science and coding are largely absent in the current curriculum, with the exception of select experiences using Code.org, Python or unplugged activities at the middle level. At the high school level, enrollment in the Computer Science courses available to students has doubled over the past three years. With 25 students currently enrolled in AP Computer Science, 13 of whom were sophomores, students risked exhausting available course options unless more robust offerings were included in the program planning guide. To meet this need the District now offers Computer Science Seminar, which is geared towards students who have already completed AP Computer Science and will focus on App Design. Plans for enhancing ongoing and developing novel curricular experiences for the 2017 – 2018 school are on-going and will continue through the summer.

In addition, to prepare for these shifts, more than 40 K-12 District teachers were trained by Code.org trainers during the 2016-2017 academic year.

Recommendation

The Transformative Curriculum team recommends that we continue to build and refine curriculum at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. We recommend that the expected technology, computing, and coding skills be clearly articulated for students at the end of elementary and middle school. We suggest planning and supporting appropriate professional development, some of which will be supported by the STEM cohort at the elementary level. Curriculum revision at the elementary level should include coding experiences for all students to be included within specified units to enhance those units. The middle level Computers curriculum should be revised to include computer science and coding in all three middle school grades, and the high school should continue efforts to maintain increased interest and enrollment in computer science courses, especially among female and minority students, who locally and nationally are underrepresented in the field.



Exploration	Maker Mentality and Makerspace
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	      

Background

A makerspace is a center of learning where people share resources, knowledge, and experience to create, invent, and learn. An ideal makerspace is the marriage of technology, hand making skills, and design to create innovative objects that are both useful and aesthetically pleasing and invite students into a greater sense of agency, inquiry, and application in and of their own learning. Makerspaces are not necessarily about a specific set of materials or physical spaces but rather a mindset of community partnership, collaboration, and creation. This mindset is referred to as a maker mentality.

There are deep interconnections between revisions to the on-going work of makerspace and maker mentality, K-12 computer science curriculum revisions, student driven schools, and the professional learning pathway.

Current Situation

Each elementary school has a makerspace cart that includes LEGOS, LittleBits, Makey-Makey, KNEX and other simple building materials such as clay, paint, straws and pipe cleaners, as well as technology such as 3D printers. A makerspace at the high school includes a combination of traditional hand tools such as saws and drills, and technology such as 3D printers, sophisticated computer hardware and software, and CNC machines. In both of these spaces, students have the opportunity to create, build, tinker, fail, and think critically as they draw, construct, collaborate, and communicate while building ownership for their learning.

At the elementary level, the Arcadia STEM Cohort was established in 2014 for the purpose of providing professional learning opportunities for teachers as they worked to further develop and strengthen the STEM program at elementary level. There are currently 37 teachers in the STEM cohort and each elementary building has at least three STEM Cohort teachers. The STEM Cohort Teachers led professional learning on integrating makerspace in June 2016 and August 2016 to all elementary teachers and continue to serve as professional resources to colleagues. Cynwyd Elementary school is currently in the process of transforming its library to include a makerspace area, which will be equipped with a 3-D printer and will serve as a prototype to guide makerspace implementation at other elementary libraries. Beginning in 2017-2018, there will be a 3-D Printer in each library. They are also incorporating class sets of robots available in each school. STEM concepts, including makerspaces, are integrated into select *Journey’s* units at each grade level are currently housed on Blackboard.

At the secondary level, the revised Art Curriculum Framework highlights maker-mentality as a central component. At the high school level, the District offers Communication Design as a course within the offerings of the Art Department. This course is geared towards students using hands, hand-tools, and technology to design and create. This course was approved by the Board in November 2016 and curriculum writing has been on-going since the approval and will continue until the course begins in September 2017.

Recommendation

Next steps at the elementary level include ensuring a guaranteed experience for every elementary student every year. To this instructional end in 2017-2018, eighteen Makerspace experiences will be integrated into current units, one each trimester in each elementary grade, ensuring three guaranteed







“making” experiences for every elementary student every year. To support this work, continued professional learning on makerspaces will continue to be provided at the elementary level, including at PLC, grade level, and faculty meetings and after school workshops led by the STEM Cohort teachers. In terms of widening the scope of this work, it is recommended that teachers have opportunities for cross classroom articulation and visits among buildings, both elementary and middle schools, as well as investigating the possibilities of partner schools/classes/ institutions. This may be well-served in collaboration with the Spirit of Community Pathway.

Next steps at the middle school level include possible curricular inclusions in Computers and Technology Education classes and/or opportunities for classroom teachers and librarians to learn more about maker mentality and the possibilities for implementation by systematically visiting other classrooms, both within and outside out of District, at both the elementary and middle level.

At the high school level, the creation of makerspaces is beginning within the Art Department, which will include a new class, entitled Communication Design in 2017-2018. In the spirit of makerspaces, the Art Department at both high schools is hosting a state-of-the-art Communication Design Lab and is beginning to build makerspaces that include oversized printers, 3-D printers, and various building tools. Lower Merion High School is also prototyping the use of two learning walls in 2017-2018, which align with the publication and presentation goals that are a part of the creation of digital portfolios.



Exploration	High School Pathways for Learning
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	   

Background

Pathways are one option for students to “specialize” in a particular area that may appeal to an individual learner’s interests, passions, and future career aspirations. By allowing students to specialize, Pathways engage students in their own education, creating the very sense of student voice and agency that echoes throughout the strategic plan.

Based on this conception of Pathways, Leslie Pratt, Jason Lilly, and Brian Cote, members of the Secondary Curriculum Team, visited the Wilson School District, which has a robust Pathways system in place, in November 2016. Outlining academic pathway options for students allowed the Wilson students to look at the offerings in the program planning differently by: (1) making explicit and implicit connections between and among course offerings and (2) supporting interdisciplinary understandings among and between disciplines, much like a college major does.

The Secondary Curriculum Team created and proposed a document for Lower Merion Pathways, which includes areas of specialization such as Visual Communication, Writing, International Business and Commerce, Global Stewardship, Sociology, Human Development, Materials Science, Health Professions/Pre-Med, Computer Science and Networking, as well as Engineering.

In addition to helping to build meaningful connections for students, Pathways can inform the District to identify gaps within our offerings so that Program Planning Guide revisions are increasingly more systematic and supportive.

Current Situation





A Lower Merion School District Pathway document, based on the current Program Planning Guide, has been drafted by the District’s curriculum team and revised based on feedback from the District’s Supervisor of K-12 Counseling and the high school principals. The document has been shared with high school counselors, teachers, and department chairs in order to incorporate their feedback as well.

Recommendation

By the October 2017 Secondary Curriculum Articulation Meeting, we recommend that this document is vetted a final time by the Curriculum Team and High School Principals with a plan to present this to the Curriculum Committee of the Board no later than December 2017 so that it can be used in course selection processes in February 2018.

Secondary Curriculum Supervisors and High School Principals are supportive of piloting the Pathway Document as a resource during course selection in February 2018. It is recommended that the Pathway document serves as a guide for students, but not as a means to force students to declare a specialization, nor bind them to any particular course pathway.



Exploration	High School Interdisciplinary Programs
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	   

Background

According to research by Vess (2009) and Repko (2009), interdisciplinary approaches to learning are highly beneficial to students for four major reasons. They help students to recognize bias and perspective, to think critically, to tolerate ambiguity, and to acknowledge ethical concerns and make decisions informed by multiple pieces of information and orientations.

Establishing interdisciplinary programs at the high school would involve revising the curriculum of four or more courses—ideally bridging the humanities and the natural and social sciences—so that learners would have the opportunity to study overarching themes, questions, or problems using the different approaches, theories, and methods highlighted in the various disciplines. (e.g. Much like programs hosted by universities, these unifying themes could be topics that cut across disciplines such as “social justice,” could refer to a particular space or time like “Philadelphia at the turn of the 20th century,” or could suggest a complex research question, such as the impact of peer-based, teacher-based, and standardized-testing feedback on students’ academic success.) This transformed curricular center would be complemented by non-traditional classroom experiences such as data gathering, research trips, travel opportunities, community based partnerships, artistic productions, and/or intensive laboratory activity.

By participating in an Interdisciplinary Program approximately 100 students each year in grades 10, 11, and 12 would commit to participating in the four courses that make up the interdisciplinary experience and would commit to the off-campus experiences that would be a regular part of the course. With the interdisciplinary courses scheduled during sets 5, 6, 7, and 8, the course could support regular and systematic out-of-school experiences (e.g. on first Friday of each month students are in a research lab, a rare book room, a museum, a community event, etc. that compliments the interdisciplinary course).

Current Situation







Interdisciplinary programs at the high school do not currently exist.

The approval of the *Pathways for Learning* document would be an integral initial step to invite a more interdisciplinary stance to high school experiences.

Recommendation

The Transformative Curriculum pathway recommends continued investigation into the creation of interdisciplinary programs like the ones described above throughout the 2017-2018 school year. Members of the curriculum team, teachers/teacher leaders, and school based administrators would also investigate the concept of “magnet” interdisciplinary programs where each high school offers a different “kind” of interdisciplinary program to pilot.



Exploration	Curriculum Review Protocol
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	     

Background

In *Mastering Global Literacy*, Heidi Hayes-Jacobs argues that “to succeed in this new global age, students will need capacities that not only include, but go beyond, reading, mathematics, and science; they will need to be far more knowledgeable and curious about world regions and global issues, attuned to diverse perspectives, able to communicate across cultures and in other languages, and disposed to acting towards the common good.” This definition of global curriculum informs the transformative vision of *All Forward’s* interdisciplinary curriculum that is student-driven and fosters innovation and positive risk-taking, transcends standards, is inquiry-based, and connects the classroom to the world. In July 2016, a group of Lower Merion educators crafted nine Transformative Goals aligned to *All Forward*, which serve to drive the experiences we expect students to have.

Current Situation




In November 2016, a Global subgroup synthesized Hayes-Jacobs’ definition of global learning, the Strategic Plan’s definition of curriculum, and the Transformative Goals to research the characteristics of Global Competence. In January 2017, the Global subcommittee drafted tangible components of a Globally Oriented Curriculum. In February 2017, the Secondary Curriculum Department used these Global Competences to inform a curricular revision framework, which was piloted by a select group as teachers began to revise the 9th Grade English Curriculum in March 2017. The current draft of the protocol for examining curriculum and inviting a more global orientation includes two parts: Larger Frame, which focus on ensuring the cultural and global understandings of students through curricular experiences aligned to the transformative goals, and Actionable Curricular Considerations/ Revisions, which focuses on identifying what is currently valued most in our practice and how it aligns to the transformative goals.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the curriculum team continue the curriculum revision work started with 9th Grade English teachers in March 2016, including soliciting feedback from the group on the process and product the protocol helped to shape. It is also recommended that the curriculum leadership team and a team of teacher leaders revisit and revise the curriculum protocol, perhaps using consultation services to revise the protocol and the Professional Development implications, goals, and timeline for 2017-2018. To support a core group of professionals in these learnings would require an estimated investment of approximately \$48,000, which would allow two educators from each of the ten buildings plus four-eight central office administrators to attend two global conferences (with an assumed cost of \$1000/learning opportunity).

Long term action steps include: (1) The creation of a teacher cohort to support the embedded globalization of curriculum. This would help the District grow at a level that would directly, and most quickly, affect student learning experiences. (2) The creation of opportunities for student travel and (3) Further work at Administrative Level and by individual teachers (across all disciplines/levels) to integrate with global perspectives into unit upgrades, learning target upgrades, etc.



Exploration	Writing Center at High Schools
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	  

Background

A focus group of recent graduates met with the Superintendent in January 2017. When asked to reflect on their high school experience with respect to college preparation, several shared they wished they had had more writing experiences in high school, had received more feedback on their writing, and had had the experience of being required to write longer papers. This echoed feedback that had been gathered in other venues. It was expressed that there are inconsistencies in the types of writing experiences, and the extent of feedback offered, based on teacher assignment. While the quality of our teachers was noted, there is a need to further establish a framework for guaranteed writing experiences and provide greater support for feedback on student writing.

In February of 2017, the Superintendent met with the Assistant Superintendent, both high school principals, both high school English department chairs, and the secondary curriculum supervisor. In the meeting, he laid out a two-fold directive: (1) ensure that students have the opportunity to write two major research papers each year and (2) ensure that student writers have ample opportunities for feedback on their writing, in addition to the feedback they already receive, through the creation of a writing lab.

Current Situation

Writing centers do not currently exist at either high school.








A framework for guaranteed writing experiences in English was established this school year and contains several research-based experiences across various grades. Additionally, the secondary librarians are in the process of compiling an overview of research practices and expectations to be taught/reinforced in all the secondary grades, 6-12. And the social studies department is drafting a guaranteed research experience and paper each year, grades 6-12.

Recommendation

The secondary curriculum supervisor and English department chairs researched various models of writing centers, visited local high school and college writing centers, did extensive reading and scholarly research, and presented a recommendation in April 2017 to establish a Peer-Based Writing Fellows Writing Center at each of the two high schools. The recommendation for this concept was given approval to continue exploration. A subgroup is currently in the process of drafting a job description for a Writing Center Director at each high school, a plan for writing fellow training, and a means to invite student voices into the planning and enactment of the Writing Center. An update with the Superintendent on process to date will be shared with the Superintendent in early June.

A formal curricular frame articulating guaranteed research-based writing experiences should be developed and shared across and among departments.



Exploration	Digital Portfolio of Student Work
Originated from	Transformative Curriculum
Additional Pathway Connections	      

Background

The concept of a Grades 1-12 Lower Merion Digital Portfolio 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.

Historically, compilations of student writing have been used in the Lower Merion School District. In fact, elementary schools continue to require students to include in a folder selections of written work, reflect on it throughout the year, and discuss this work in celebrations of writing throughout the year as well as year-end student-led conferences. Elementary students revisit their writing folders at year’s end and select a best piece, which select teachers anthologize into class books sent home with students that include a piece of writing by each student. The writing folders once followed students to middle and high school, where students would be directed by English teachers, each year, to include additional writing pieces. At the end of senior year, students were invited to pick up their writing folders, 85% of which went unclaimed and were ultimately recycled. The last year of physical K-12 writing folders was 2006. This experiment in accumulating students’ writing over time ended because students seemed disconnected from this work due to little student voice or agency.

From this experience, we have learned a critically important detail about portfolios. For a portfolio to be successful, the materials to be included need to be selected by students who feel a sense of agency and ownership, need to honor literacies across disciplines and modes, and must include systematic reflection.

Current Situation





With the exception of elementary writing folders, systematic, longitudinal collection of student work, either digital or print, is not in place in Lower Merion School District.

The Transformative Curriculum Team has created a Digital Portfolio Initiative draft, which includes a vision statement, a frame, parameters for portfolio inclusion, a list of barriers and questions, and a list of potential survey questions to help us locate, understand, and leverage bright spots that currently exist. During May 2017 and June 2017, the Digital Portfolio subgroup plans to share this information with additional colleagues, to add to the questions/barriers section and begin to address both, to revisit the document, and to add to the google survey regarding digital portfolio work already being done in the District.

Recommendation

The Transformative Curriculum Pathway recommends that during the 2017-2018 academic year, the digital portfolio subgroup share this frame with a wider audience of teachers and students to solicit feedback and strategies for implementation, to collaborate with the Technology Department to select and pilot a digital tool for portfolio creation, to collaborate with the Redefining Success Pathway to determine if and how the practices of portfolio creation could be included on revised report cards, and to collaborate with the Professional Learning Pathway to provide teachers with learning opportunities related to writing instruction and cultivating reflection and inquiry.



Exploration	Grade Weighting			
Originated from	Redefining Success			
Additional Pathway Connections				

Background

A significant shift away from a singular and simplified definition of academic success has taken place over the past five years. During this time, reflective practitioners within the District have begun to reflect on, inquire into, and generate questions about our high school organizational practices and policies with regards to grading, weighting, and ranking.

These practices historically focused on competition and hierarchy instead of reflecting student learning or engagement in the learning process. Like many other high-achieving high schools, our system of grade weighting, class rank, and graduation designations encourage competition in service of a grade that is increasingly less and less meaningful to students, especially as students learn “to do school.” This begs the question: are grade weighting, class rank, and the valedictorian/salutatorian designation still relevant?

Current Situation





The current LMSD policy on Weighted Grades is that courses identified as Honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate Level Courses are identified as “weighted” courses, scored on a 5.0 scale, while courses identified as College Preparatory are “unweighted,” scored on a 4.0 scale. In gathering information on the practices of comparable local high schools relevant to grade weighting, the sub-committee learned that some like-high schools and several private schools no longer use a grade weighting system. The removal of grade weighting in these schools has had no impact on college acceptances. We also contacted several colleges and university admissions offices, who consistently explained that colleges and universities apply their own system of assessing the value of applicants and their relevant courses within the application process.

Recommendation

Conceptually, the current system of grade weighting should be dissolved. The system contributes to a hierarchical and competitive system that detracts from the focus on learning and provides extrinsic benefits to honors enrollment. This sub-committee should continue to investigate the longer term implications and impact on students of eliminating these systems. As class ranking is increasingly obsolete, the need to use GPA as a tool to rank students joins it in obsolescence.

The recommendation is to eliminate the grade weighting system for courses during the 2018-19 academic year for 9- grade students, phasing in the dissolution of grade weighting over time. Grade weighting is not beneficial to all students and inadvertently gives the impression that some courses (those that are weighted) are inherently more valuable than others (those not weighted). It often results in students making course selections based on the grade weighting instead of course value or the appropriateness of level, thus increasing unnecessary pressures on students and promoting unproductive and unhealthy academic competition. Given that this is a proposed policy change, this change will require more deeply vetting with the community, students, and staff. Feedback will be gathered through the process of proposing policy changes.



<i>Exploration</i>	Class Rank			
<i>Originated from</i>	Redefining Success			
<i>Additional Pathway Connections</i>				

Background

There has been a significant shift in our professional work surrounding assessments over the past five years, and, during this time, we have begun to reflect on, inquire into, and generate questions around our high school-level organizational practices and policies with regards to class rank. These practices are focused on competition and hierarchy instead of being a true reflection of learning or growth. We have unconsciously created a system of competition where students must compete against one another in service of a grade that, in fact, becomes less and less meaningful over time. So, we ask: does class rank even matter anymore? The answer is no. Students should, in fact, be competing against exemplary standards which, in turn, set high expectations for all students, at all grade levels. We do not believe that the purpose of grades should be to differentiate between and sort students.





Current Situation

LMSD currently does not report class rank and makes every effort to de-emphasize its importance, but it does exist and is determined by listing students ordinally by GPA. When a student sends an application to a college, an explanation of Lower Merion School District’s policy of not reporting a class rank accompanies the transcript. However, if the college informs the high school that it requires a class rank and without which the student applicant could be at a disadvantage, the school will provide an academic class rank. This request must be made by the specific college in writing and must be done for every college requesting the class rank. The rank is based only on grades earned in the major academic courses meeting 3x out of every cycle; such as, English, math, science, world languages, and social studies. It includes regular and summer school. School Board policy dictates that this does not include Saturday classes. Please note that class rank is calculated only at the conclusion of the student’s junior year, including summer school. In practice, class rank is requested infrequently from colleges. Typically this will be expected for students applying to a military academy.

Recommendation

The recommendation is to remove class ranking by September of 2018-19. The reason for this recommendation is that the differences in grade point averages among high achieving students are usually statistically insignificant, ranking provides little if any practical benefits. What becomes evident, when singling out those with the best grades, is often those who can navigate school and curricular logistics are rewarded, therefore it places undue priority on the superficial aspects of learning and adds an unnecessary sense of stressful competition. Our fundamental purpose is learning. In that we should be developing talent and not selecting talent. Currently, we are gathering information on what other local high schools are doing with class rank. The next step would be to look at the logistical ramifications if the system is removed. Finally, the goal would be to eliminate the class rank system by 2018-19 for 9th grade only and phase it in every year after. Given that this is a proposed policy change, this change will require more deeply vetting with the community, students, and staff. Feedback will be gathered through the process of proposing policy changes.



<i>Exploration</i>	Valedictorian and Salutatorian			
<i>Originated from</i>	Redefining Success			
<i>Additional Pathway Connections</i>				

Background

There has been a significant shift in our professional work surrounding assessments over the past five years, and, during this time, we have begun to reflect on, inquire into, and generate questions around our high school-level organizational practices and policies with regards to grade weighting, class rank, and the valedictorian/salutatorian designation. These practices are focused on competition and hierarchy instead of being a true reflection of a learning environment. We have unconsciously created a system of competition where students must compete against one another in service of a grade that, in fact, becomes less and less meaningful over time. So, we ask: Does grade weighting, class rank, and the valedictorian/salutatorian designation even matter anymore? The answer is: no, they do not. Students should, in fact, be competing against exemplary standards which, in turn, set high expectations for all students, at all grade levels. We no longer believe that the purpose of grades should be to discriminate and therefore sort students by level of courses, student ranking, and/or selecting a class academic leader by a GPA.

Current Situation

The LMSD current policy on Valedictorian/Salutatorian: The Valedictorian and Salutatorian of the graduating senior class are selected at the conclusion of the third marking period.

- **Valedictorian**--The Valedictorian is the student with the highest grade point average in the senior class, i.e., the student who is ranked number one in the class by virtue of his/her grade point average.
- **Salutatorian**--The Salutatorian is the student with the second highest grade point average. The Valedictorian and the Salutatorian will have the distinct honor of leading the processional of graduates and delivering a speech at the commencement program. Grade point averages to determine the Valedictorian and Salutatorian shall be calculated using the final grades achieved as a freshman, sophomore and junior and all quarter grades from marking periods one, two and three achieved during the senior year. Grades earned in all subjects completed in the five major areas (English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, World Language) will be included in these calculations. This does NOT include Art, Music, PE/Health, Technology and Engineering Education, Business/Computer and Information Technology or FCS courses. Any course graded on a pass/fail basis will not be included in these calculations. Students who are eligible to be recognized as Valedictorian or Salutatorian must have completed seven quarters in Lower Merion School District with three quarters completed during the student’s senior year.

In practice, there are annually multiple students who finish their stellar academic careers with a 5.0 GPA. There are four tiebreakers outlined in the student handbook to differentiate among these students in order to determine the valedictorian and salutatorian. Even after these tiebreakers, there are still students who remain tied, leaving the decision to be at the discretion of the principal.




Recommendation

The recommendation is to remove Valedictorian/Salutatorian designation by September of 2018-19. The reason for this recommendation is that the selection process is based on rank-ordering of graduates, with each student pitted against all others for a single distinction. The current Valedictorian/Salutatorian



designees are asked to speak at graduation and often times these are humble students who may not desire to speak or highlight their academic accomplishment. This is a tradition that does not foster the traits we should value in students. Currently, we are gathering information on whether other local high schools are still using the valedictorian/salutatorian designations. The next step would be to look at the logistical ramifications if the system is removed. In reference to graduation ceremony itself, we would propose implementing an academic speaker with a selection process that was based on a variety of factors - not just a student's GPA. It is recommended that the District continues to value and celebrate high achievement amongst our students. There are many positive traditions that should continue, including Academic Awards ceremonies, National Honor Society inductions, etc. Given that this is a proposed policy change, this change will require more deeply vetting with the community, students, and staff. Feedback will be gathered through the process of proposing policy changes.



Exploration	Grade Point Average		
Originated from	Redefining Success		
Additional Pathway Connections			

Background

There has been a long-standing debate within LMSD regarding the inclusion of all courses in the calculation of GPA versus our existing practice of only core courses/classes counting in the calculation.

Those who believe all courses should count within students’ GPA believe this is a statement of valuing diverse curricular experiences with equal degrees of respect. The stance suggests that we, as a District, value the experiences students have in all courses without suggesting that one course is more significant than another.

Those who believe only core courses should count within students’ GPA believe that this is freeing to students who can take other courses that they might not have otherwise taken without the pressure of the GPA calculation.

Current Situation





The current LMSD policy on the Calculation of GPA is that only final grades and only courses in the five major academic areas (English, mathematics, science, social studies and world languages) will contribute to the calculation of a student’s GPA and will count towards graduation.

Research undertaken by this subcommittee has found that like-high schools, and several private schools, include all courses in the calculation in GPA. It should also be noted that counting all courses/classes in a GPA has no impact on college/university acceptance.

Recommendation

Both sides of this debate have merit; however, if we are still going to use a GPA designation then we need to value our students’ interests and all of their experiences by incorporating all courses in the GPA. (Of course, this is based on the premise that we are still calculating a GPA). The recommendation is to incorporate all courses/classes in the calculation of GPA during the 2018-2019 academic year for 9th grade only and phase it in every year after. Connected to this recommendation, the removal of grade-weighting and continued de-emphasis on class rank should alleviate the extrinsic concerns that may prevent a student from pursuing a course of interest. Given that this is a proposed policy change, this change will require more deeply vetting with the community, students, and staff. Feedback will be gathered through the process of proposing policy changes.



Exploration	Elementary Report Cards			
Originated from	Redefining Success			
Additional Pathway Connections				

Background

The big idea of Lower Merion School District’s pathway, Redefining Success, states that “we will transform how we define, measure, and report student achievement with a focus on each student's individualized growth and mastery in areas that extend beyond traditional academic indicators.” The majority of teachers grade the way they were graded as a student (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Traditional grading combines academic achievement with other factors including behavior, attitude, work habits, study skills, and effort (Marzano, 2000; Brookhart, 1991). Standards-based grading addresses this problem by requiring teachers to rely on specific learning criteria developed from standards to assign grades (Guskey, 2010). Furthermore, the addition of teacher narrative will create a more comprehensive report of student growth.

The purpose of exploring the elementary report card is more effectively communicate with parents and students about the achievement of specific learning standards. It identifies students’ levels of progress with regard to those standards, areas of strength, and areas for growth. Any proposed revision will seek to align LMSD curriculum and grading practices with our reporting tool.

Current Situation

Teachers report that the most significant frustration with the current elementary report card is the lack of alignment to the standards and curriculum. Teachers report that it is difficult to accurately report on student progress due to the limitations of the format. As a result, many teachers create additional progress notes in order to provide specific and relevant feedback. Teachers collect data on their students based on the standards to drive instruction. This is very difficult to translate into the current rubric format.

The current report card contains a narrative piece after each content area. Inconsistency is evident in narratives throughout the District due to teacher discretion of what should be included in this piece of the report card. Also, the current report card does not include reporting on much of what we value in a learner beyond standards. Our strategic plan encourages measuring and reporting on development of students to define success more broadly, including fostering a growth mindset, innovation, and other measures of habits of mind. The parameters of our current report card do not meet this expectation.

The process for editing and printing report cards is very time consuming and uneconomical. Because they are printed on legal size paper, they must be printed in the office. The office prints a draft of each student’s report card for teachers and administrators to review. Then a final copy is printed. This is time consuming for office staff and teachers. A tight timeline is created for this process which leaves teachers feeling pressured to complete grades before the marking period is actually over.

Elementary report cards are distributed with students in their backpacks. Parents have expressed frustration with this process for a variety of reasons including being absent on the day of distribution and the responsibility of students to deliver them.







Recommendation

The Redefining Success Pathway is recommending the following regarding revision of the Elementary Report Cards:

1. Develop a standards-based report card prototype with the input of staff, students, and the community. The purpose of this report card is to effectively communicate with parents and students about the achievement of specific learning standards. It identifies students' levels of progress with regard to those standards, areas of strength, and areas for growth. This revision seeks to align LMSD curriculum and grading practices with our reporting tool. Provide exemplars for teacher narrative section.
2. Include technology staff so that PowerSchool can be a tool for the creation of this new template
3. Electronically share report cards with families, but continue to print for those who request it or those without internet access.
4. Plan Professional Development for staff in grading and reporting using a standards-based report card
5. Implement by phasing in each new cohort
6. Ensure curricular alignment between assessments and eligible content

A committed group of teachers has created a pilot version of the report card for grade 4. This was proposed to the board of school directors in June to be piloted for the 2017-18 school year.



Exploration	Skill-Based Grade Reporting		
Originated from	Redefining Success		
Additional Pathway Connections			 

Background

As staff have continued ongoing work around assessment design, they have also begun to make connections between what is assessed and how performance on these assessments is reported. From October-December 2016, secondary teachers at Lower Merion High School representing English, Math, Science, and World Language Departments reviewed the current high school report card as they read *Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading* by Tim Westerberg. These teacher leaders and a supporting administrator picked a course from each of these disciplines to explore what standards-aligned feedback to be included on a high school report card might look like. The potential piloting courses include: 9th grade English, Biology, Spanish 4, and Computer Science.

This subcommittee also conducted phone conferences with Aaron Rudy, PowerSchool consultant, to discuss the logistics of skills-based grade reporting on high school report cards through PowerSchool. Additionally, the subcommittee completed an analysis of standards-based report cards from 10 different states, some of which included narrative feedback.

Current Situation






Skills-based grade-reporting systems do not currently exist at the high school. High school report cards currently use content-based reporting systems.

Recommendation

In 2017-2018, the pathway recommends to pilot small-scale revisions of meaningful, standards-based feedback on report cards directly linked to and guided by standards aligned assessments designed by staff. A Spanish 4 class is ready to pilot supplemental standards-based feedback and reporting on report cards in 2017-2018 along with 9th Grade English which will be ready to pilot supplemental standards-based feedback on report cards when curriculum revisions are complete and with an aim of 2017-2018. Biology and Math aim to be ready to pilot in 2018-2019.

The cost to include these piloted revisions on high school report cards will be approximately \$3000 in order to use PowerSchool for skills based reporting.



Exploration	9th Grade Transition			
Originated from	Student-Driven Schools			
Additional Pathway Connections				 

Background

The mission of the strategic plan of the Lower Merion School District is to “...ensure that all students achieve their highest level of critical thinking and creativity, that they value themselves and the diversity of others, and that they are knowledgeable, contributing citizens capable of excelling in a rapidly changing world.” This is reinforced in the LMSD strategic plan. The administration and school counseling departments have worked over the past several years to improve our transient program for students between 8th and 9th grade. National data on students’ transitioning to high school show this to be pivotal, with many students struggling with the transition. The efforts within LMSD have helped to ensure smooth transitions for most of our students. The mission of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is directly aligned with the mission of the Lower Merion School District. Therefore, the counseling department plays a critical role in the achievement of these goals. With these core missions in place, the desire to review our current Guidance Department practices and learn from other similar school districts grew following a visit in the summer of 2016 to Scarsdale High School (NY) by District administrative staff.

Current Situation

Eight grade students have several opportunities to visit the high schools, to learn about the programs, and to connect with staff and other students. There are intentional efforts by the school counselors to get to know students at all levels but place a greater emphasis on the transition year. Despite these efforts, the relationship between a student and the counselor is very different for middle school students than it is for high school students for a variety of reasons. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, high school counselors began meeting in the fall with 9th grade students in small groups as an introduction. They also had meetings with students in other grades (10th grade students to discuss PSAT scores and course selection; 11th graders and their parents for the junior year college meetings). Counselors are also available to meet with students on as a needed basis, and also get to know students through a range of parent meetings.





In exploring the Scarsdale High School program, there are elements of “frontloading” support for 9th graders and strengthening the transition support for incoming 9th graders that have proven to be successful there.

Recommendation

The Student Driven Schools Pathway Team recommends that Lower Merion and Harriton High schools should look at instituting some version of Scarsdale’s model, in particular the concept of “frontloading.” By “frontloading” for 9th grade students, the relationship among students and between students and counselor strengthens earlier. When students encounter difficulties they may have already learned how to manage it or a resource to turn to. Students will have already established the relationships with their counselor to rely upon. By doing so we are developing relationships not only with those students with the most needs, but all students including those whose needs may not yet have been identified.

Lower Merion School District should plan to organize a team to visit Scarsdale throughout the 2017-2018 school year. Representatives from student services teams, administration, and others should visit, meet, and observe current practices at Scarsdale with consideration for a potential pilot program.



Exploration	Elementary Student-Driven Learning Plans			
Originated from	Student-Driven Schools			
Additional Pathway Connections				

Background

In All Forward: Strategic Pathways for Lower Merion School District, we state, “Students must be active agents in the learning process in developmentally-appropriate ways. The research is clear: when students are intrinsically-motivated, they are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges; their growth will be more lasting and they are more likely to transfer learned competencies to novel contexts. We seek to ensure that each student is fully engaged in personal goal setting and reflection in developmentally appropriate ways throughout their learning journeys.”

Students learn best and achieve higher academic growth when given the opportunity to become active participants in their learning targets and skills. With intentional preparation of lessons, “students become self-regulated learners who set their own goals, select effective strategies to reach those goals, and monitor and adjust what they do depending on the demands of the task and their own strengths and needs” (*Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom, by Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart, Dec. 2009*).

When elementary students are motivated to self-assess their own specific learning targets, their academic engagement strengthens thus fostering higher academic achievement. Actively involving elementary students in the creation of their own differentiated quarterly learning plans will help students develop valuable lifelong skills, become autonomous learners, develop a growth mindset, and build resilience (*Responsive Classroom, The Joyful Classroom*). Students will recognize their own innate ability that they can grow and change. We are instilling within our students a love of learning in an enriching and collaborative environment where their voice drives the curriculum.

Current Situation

Elementary teachers engage students in goal-setting learning plans at the start of each school year. Students and teachers preview the year to come while reflecting on what students already do well against what they hope to improve upon during the school year.

During the spring parent-teacher conferences, elementary students lead the conference through a variety of means: portfolios, PowerPoints, oral presentations, assessment scales, SMART goals, and more to show personal growth and achievements since the beginning of the school year.

Recommendation

The Student-Driven Schools Pathway Team recommends that, throughout the 2017-2018 school year, that a subcommittee collaboratively explores the creation of a framework for implementation. We recommend that learning plans should be reviewed minimally three times a year with students, based on our current trimester system. Students should create one focused goal at a time according to their specific needs, thus achieving mastery at individual timelines from their peers.

Students should be encouraged to consider what they want to learn or to practice, and to set a personal goal for this topic. Goals need to be age-appropriate, relevant, and well-defined. Students should be setting goals continuously. As one goal is achieved, a new goal is then set. A student can choose an







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academic concept/target or a social-emotional skill to further develop. This learning plan can be core content in the classroom, or a fine arts learning plan occurring during specials (Library, Art, Music, Gym, FLES). Specialists and homeroom teachers will work accordingly to help the student achieve success. Students will need varied tools that meet their learning styles. Teachers construct checklists, rubrics, and structures for reflection as a framework for students to achieve meaningful growth and learning. Professional development for elementary teachers to effectively and meaningfully collaborate on individual learning plans with each student will need to be configured.

We recommend that this idea be forwarded to the Go Team for recommendations for an implementation plan to be constructed during the 2017-2018 school year with full implementation in the fall of 2018.



Exploration	“Genius” Hour			
Originated from	Student Driven Schools			
Additional Pathway Connections				

Background

In *All Forward: Strategic Pathways for Lower Merion School District* we state we will adjust our system to one that affords more self-directed goal setting and positive risk taking within safe learning environments across the K-12 continuum.

Genius Hour, also referred to as Innovation Time and Passion Projects, is derived from an approach by Google (and other innovative companies) whereby employees are given 20% of their time to work on projects of their choosing in order to explore personal interests and passions. The result of this time in the business world has been numerous innovations such as Gmail and Google News.

In the classroom, teachers have adopted the concept in order to provide students with an hour a week or up to 20% of their time to explore their own learning and passions.

The Genius Hour approach to learning meets many of the objectives in the Transformative Goals. The driving force behind it is the idea that students are in charge of the learning, flipping the traditional paradigm of teachers being the disseminators of knowledge.

Genius Hour is a way for students to explore passions and interests, ultimately resulting in higher engagement, interactive learning, and critical thinking. Students identify a topic and an essential or driving question that leads to research. The research findings are used to create a final product. A key component in this approach is that students share their work, and reflect on their learning. Student ownership of learning, and heightened engagement are key benefits of Genius Hour.





Current Situation

There are currently pockets of instruction where Genius Hour is being employed. It is not widespread and is dependent on teacher interest both at the elementary and middle school levels. There is no systematic approach to Genius Hour in the District at this time. Teachers using Genius Hour have modeled this for peers at the District’s EdCamps during professional learning time.

Recommendation

Genius hour could be approached in a broad scope where any subject area can be selected, or it can be used as a way to provide choice within a given subject areas. The Student Driven Schools Pathway recommends that the Lower Merion School District invite teachers to pilot Genius Hour across disciplines at each level, K-5, and provide a venue for those teachers to collaborate across the school year. Teacher resources such as online genius hour courses, books, and time for collaboration should be considered. Support for necessary student resources should also be provided.



Exploration	Elementary and Middle School Electives		
Originated from	Student-Driven Schools		
Additional Pathway Connections			 

Background

Student choice in their electives is an important topic to discuss when looking at the goals of our District’s Strategic Plan. Options for electives can help to create an environment where students value self-reflection and inquiry and play a central role in identifying their passions, strengths and achieving their goals outside of the core curriculum.

Electives allow students to explore and experience various areas of interest that might not be obvious in their core classes. It also enables students to see their strengths. Elementary and middle school is an opportunity to try new things that they may not have considered.

Current Situation

Currently in Lower Merion School District, specials/electives are built into every elementary student’s schedule. Specials at the elementary level consist of physical education (PE), Art, Library, Music, and Foreign Language (FLES). FLES is determined by the specific school that the student attends. In 4th and 5th grade, students can choose to pursue orchestra or band as a music elective.




At the middle school level the specials/electives are referred to as Personal Development (PD) classes. As students transition from elementary to middle school, the only choice they have for PD classes is their music selection (music lab, chorus, band/orchestra). The middle school PD classes consist of PE, Art, Music selection, Computers, Health, Technology Education, Family & Consumer Science, and at the 6th grade level, their FLES is a continuation from elementary school.

At this time the PD classes at both middle schools are delivered differently in regards to time and year. The Foreign Language class at both schools becomes a core academic class in 7th and 8th grade. Students can choose their language going into 7th grade.

Recommendation

Through the work of the middle school scheduling team it has been recommended that students in 6th grade have the opportunity to experience all electives offered in order for a student to better identify areas of strength and interest. With the middle school schedule changing in 2017-2018, students in 7th and 8th grade will have the opportunity to provide a level of input and choice into the selection of special area classes in their schedule. Each grade in middle school will bring about increased student input in one’s schedule.



Exploration	Physical Education Waivers for HS Students in Interscholastic Sports	
Originated from	Student-Driven Schools	
Additional Pathway Connections	 	

Background

Students are often overscheduled and overbooked as they attempt to convey to colleges and universities their diverse interests and passions. This overreaching has been shown to cause students stress and a lack of personal care including sleep deprivation.

It is presumed that students who are involved in interscholastic sports are getting regular exercise and engaged in an active lifestyle. This begs the question as to the purpose and benefit of requiring physical education classes for these students and whether or not their time during the school day could be better utilized as an unscheduled class. Historically, the idea of personalized learning, student choice, and elective offerings only exists in content areas outside of the Physical Education department.

Current Situation

Students at both high schools are currently scheduled into a Physical Education course every year as part of fulfilling state graduation requirements. The class meets one time for every four day cycle. Students may not opt out of the class, nor may they replace it with interscholastic participation. If a student misses a class due to a scheduled interscholastic sporting event, the expectation at both Lower Merion and Harriton high schools is that students are required to make up the missed class unless it was a playoff game or regional game. Not making up the class has a negative impact on student grades for the course.

Recommendation






For multiple reasons, we are not recommending permitting students to opt out of PE, even if they are active participants in interscholastic sports. The reasons for this are:

- We need to consistently promote health and wellness for our students.
- Exercise and good health habits can result in more effective learning.
- We currently do not waive other graduation requirements for demonstrated student participation or proficiency outside of school
- Pennsylvania Code determines that, as a graduation requirement, Physical Education shall be taught to every student yearly in grades 9 through 12. The regulations do not allow for waivers out of a class simply due to participation in an activity.

While we do not recommend pursuing the PE waiver, we do recommend the following:

- The Physical Education departments should explore the idea of developing personalized courses and increased student choice within the PE course offerings, including more specialized courses such as Yoga, Personal Fitness, Weight Training, Team Sports, Racket Sports, Sports Medicine, Self-Defense, etc. These offerings should be formalized and included in the 2018-2019 High School Planning Guide.
- Revise the department requirement to waive PE students from needing to make-up a class for missing it due to early dismissal for participation in interscholastic athletics. This should not be limited to playoff or regional competitions.



Exploration	Student Voice				
Originated from	Student Driven Schools				
Additional Pathway Connections					

Background

As part of *All Forward: Strategic Pathways for Lower Merion School District* the student driven pathway states that we will “provide opportunities for more student voices to be heard across the District (School Board) and in the classroom.”

With this in mind, the Student Driven Schools Pathway Team explored multiple options to inquire from students about their experience. Students were adamant during a steering committee meeting that we not develop another survey. They merely stated that we should come speak with them.

At the end of the 2015-2016 school year and the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year members of the pathway team organized student focus groups in grades 5, 6, 7, & 9-12. The pathway worked with Dr. Kristina Ayers Paul to understand the proper steps to ensure reliability with the information gathered. Members of the team worked with building administration and counselors in randomly selecting students and gaining permission to participate. The topic of these discussions was centered on opportunities for student choice in their learning.

Current Situation





The contractual requirement of a student feedback form that is to be completed by students in grades 7-12 for all classes and teachers is the only District level system in place to currently gather student voice. However, the feedback form is only viewed by the teacher and is not used beyond the individual classroom.

Teachers have shared that student feedback and reflection of units and lessons are a regular step in the lesson design process; however, documentation of this varies by teacher as it’s meant to serve each teachers individual reflection for future lessons.

Recommendation

Members of the Student Driven Schools Pathway Team believe that a regular systematic process of gathering student voice across the District around various topics identified by a team of teachers or administrators should be put in place beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. There are several ways to gather student voice and the student driven pathway has moved the concept of opportunities for student voice to the Go Team to help with District-wide systemic planning.



Exploration	Instructional Coaching Model			
Originated from	Professional Learning			
Additional Pathway Connections				

Background

Lower Merion School District is committed to providing job embedded professional learning that is driven by desired student learning outcomes, and the District has been supportive in creating opportunities for professionals to collaborate in order to support students and the strategic plan’s intended outcomes. In pursuit of achieving these desired learning outcomes for all students, the District has provided significant support for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in which teams of professionals identify what is essential for students to learn, in what ways students show evidence that they have learned what is essential, how teachers respond when students have not yet met learning targets, and how teachers respond when students already know the learning targets. PLCs are one strategy in which to embed professional learning opportunities during and throughout the school day. Furthermore, there has been an instructional practice in Lower Merion School District where teachers have supported students outside of the regular classroom for both intervention and enrichment experiences. While the District has transitioned to a co-teaching model with special education teachers co-teaching with regular education teachers, support for regular education classes relies most heavily on a pull-out model.

With the adoption of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) a collaborative culture around sharing instructional strategies, assessments, lesson design, and data analysis has been fostered. This mindset of growth through professional collaboration has established a foundation for peer feedback on instruction.

Current Situation

While PLC’s come together as interdisciplinary and content-area teams to discuss the progress of students and how they can collectively support students through learning processes, we do not have a strong District-wide framework for peer feedback on instruction. Teachers who participate in a differentiated supervision evaluation plan may participate in a process of peer coaching. Peer coaching is designed to provide professionals with beneficial feedback to strengthen instructional effectiveness in areas where improvement is desired. Peer feedback is directly provided to the professional through the peer coach and is not shared for evaluative or supervision purposes. While teachers have engaged in, and embraced, the opportunity, there has not been formalized professional learning in place around doing this effectively, nor has there been an expected framework established for this.

Furthermore, the District utilizes mathematics and reading specialist across all grade levels. The mathematics and reading specialists are great resources for the buildings, but currently their focus on working with specific students based on need.







Recommendation

The pathway team recommends moving forward with the adoption of an instructional coaching model that centers on improving learning for *all* members of the school community within a supportive system. The focus is to build capacity within each school and its teachers to best meet the learning needs of all students, enhance instructional practices at the classroom level, and raise student achievement. Teachers benefit by being invited into a culture of sustained reflective practice, where they take risks to change practices and where powerful conversations can take place.



Over the summer of 2017, a professional learning plan around the adoption of Instructional Coaching will be established. Over the 2017-2018 school year, the framework for the model will be established and we will seek to repurpose existing staff to support the instructional coaching format. This will include allocating time and resources, identifying and training coaches, and providing professional learning to the teaching staff at large to establish a foundation for success for a full implementation to begin the 2018-2019 school year. The K12 curriculum team will work with the MCIU and neighboring districts who have successfully adopted this model. The cost for training would be approximately \$45,000 and would be funded by professional learning funds from the Ready to Learn Grant.



Exploration	Assessment Literacy
Originated from	Professional Learning
Additional Pathway Connections	     

Background

Secondary teachers have been historically developing their own instructional assessments. Often times, certain items on the assessment are valued more than others even when delivering a common curriculum. Instructional language and assessment language is sometime different from one classroom to another. Furthermore, the grading and assessment of a unit is often very different from one teacher to another. This creates questions as to what we truly value in an assessment.

Teachers in common course are also expected to design units, including assessments that are grounded in consistent essential learning. While teachers retain autonomy on instructional strategies, lesson design, and some formative assessment, we do not waver on the expectation that essential learning in a course is consistently maintained. As such, building assessment literacy in our staff will result in improved assessment creation, grading practices, and analysis of data and assessments. Instruction and learning will improve.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, professional learning District-wide focused on assessment design, specifically the building of meaningful common assessments within PLCs. During the 2016-2017 academic year, professional learned partially-focused on the analysis, refinement, and revision of assessments and assessment design. This on-going work includes Assessment Design Overviews created by the curriculum team and shared with administrators (January 2017 and April 2017), new teachers at NTAP (February 2017), and multiple content-area teachers (February 2017). This work is complemented by professional learning experiences provided by Dr. Drew Gitomer from Rutgers University, who has worked and continues to work with District math and science teachers regarding assessment design and its connection to instruction. The ultimate aim of this work is to craft assessments that reliably and validly gauge what we, as a District, value. These clear, explicit statements of what we value, when aligned to specific grade-level assessments and expectations, become the foundation of a more meaningful, standards-based feedback and reporting system.

There are deep interconnections between on-going assessment design work, the investigation of protocols for skills-based grade reporting, and the long-term professional development plan necessary to ensure that these two initiatives support and complement each other.

Current Situation

During the 2016-2017 school year, a select group of elementary specialists and secondary mathematics and science teachers began working with curriculum supervisors, PLC teams, and Dr. Gitomer to garner a better understanding of assessment, and its connection with instruction. The idea of levels of questions (foundational, conceptual, and analytical) in support of developed “purpose” and “frame” have been shared out to the major content areas as well as the New Teacher (NTAP) group. Additionally, for a small subset of teacher there has been some professional learning around the grading of assessments and the impact this has on students. Currently, groups of teachers are developing common assessments and are rethinking how they assign values and grades to those assessments. The “Assessment Design Protocol”, and “Assessment Evaluation/Reflection Tool” have been shared and presented to the administrative leaders by the curriculum team.








Recommendation

Beginning June 2017 and continuing throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, there will be ongoing work with the Assessment Design Overview and Evaluation Tool. This includes the curriculum team developing and supporting a common understanding of the Form or Frame of an assessment. They will then be able to delve into analyzing the Prompting Tasks or Questions and how they connect to foundational, conceptual, and analytical understandings of students. There will be a parallel process of professional learning for classroom teachers, some of whom will work with Dr. Gitomer revising and improving assessment questions after the initial evaluation against his rubric.

We recommend consideration for an emphasis to be placed on assessment literacy as we are creating the long-term professional learning plan. With the District's focus on the Marzano 9 Instructional Strategies this year, moving toward working on assessment and its connection to instruction is a logical next step. We recommend assessment to be maintained as a staple in the Superintendent's Reports that Principals submit and suggest further professional learning to develop the assessment literacy of our administrators and teachers.



<i>Exploration</i>	Lesson-Study				
<i>Originated from</i>	Professional Learning				
<i>Additional Pathway Connections</i>					

Background

Through our work with the unit upgrades during the 2016-2017 school year, it became evident how teachers can benefit from collective and collaborative lesson planning. The District recognizes the complexity of planning, teaching and professional learning. As noted in the District’s Instructional Planning Policy (#111), “Teaching is a purposeful activity that requires the creation of lesson and unit plans. The planning requires the thoughtful construction of lessons that contain cognitively engaging learning activities, alignment to the curriculum and state standards, the incorporation of appropriate resources and materials, knowledge of students’ individual needs, and intentional differentiation of instruction.”

As new units and assessments are developed, well thought out and documented lesson plan designs are critical to ensure alignment toward instructional standards. Essential activities specifically targeting student needs are necessary in lesson design and planning. Currently, teachers design and plan lessons together, but there is no systematical process or procedure for providing peer feedback on the delivery and reflection of these plans.

Current Situation

Currently, teachers design and plan lessons together. However, there is no systematic process or procedure for providing peer feedback on the delivery and reflection of these plans. Currently, one elementary school, Penn Valley, has a lesson study protocol in place that began in the 2016.

Teachers across the District are currently involved in upgrading instructional units, and aligning these units to the transformative goals. Additionally, mathematics and science teachers at the secondary level are currently analyzing local assessments to develop aligned assessments to the units they teach. Studying lesson plans and discussing the effectiveness of the plan is essential in order to make necessary adjustments to teaching and learning. The Commitment to Professional Learning Pathway Team met to clarify our purpose for creating a lesson study protocol. The discussion focused around five essential questions:






1. What is a lesson study?
2. Why is it a meaningful form of professional learning?
3. How does a lesson study connect with what we are already doing?
4. How could a lesson study be embedded into professional learning?
5. What are effective models of lesson study that are useful in our context?

Recommendation

We recommend to move forward on a small scale to further work out a framework around the five essential questions listed above. Furthermore, we would like to conduct more explicit research around effective models of lesson studies.

The pathway team would work closely with curriculum supervisors to develop a lesson study protocol to be used for the development of lesson plans that are aligned to unit upgrades and assessment results. This lesson study protocol will be used within PLC’s to discuss content delivery among subjects and or grade level teams.



Exploration	Long-Term Professional Learning Plan		
Originated from	Professional Learning		
Additional Pathway Connections			  

Background

The Commitment to Professional Learning Pathway’s statement of strategic intent asserts that the District will transform its approach to professional learning from a top-down model to one that honors and harnesses educators’ collective wisdom in service of the intended outcomes of *All Forward*. Focused on actualizing this bold statement, the pathway created an action plan last school year, which mapped out how to leverage distributive leadership, collaboration through the professional learning community (PLC) process, and embedded professional learning during the school day to shift District practice. Nine long-term transfer goals, which describe personal, cultural, and global competencies for all students, were developed this school year and formalized the student learning outcomes of a transformative curriculum.

Current Situation

Over the course of this school year, the pathway, in collaboration with curriculum supervisors, identified classical and more contemporary instructional beliefs and practices likely to result in students not only achieving traditional standards-based goals, but also the more transformative ones described above. Accordingly, all professionals engaged in professional learning about nine classical instructional practices, identified by Robert Marzano, that data indicate yield high levels of student learning. Collaborations about these nine instructional practices helped to affirm District values, create shared language, and inform our work moving forward.

The pathway is in progress of creating a coordinated, multi-year professional learning plan that is aligned to the student long-term transfer goals, identifies classical and more contemporary instructional stances and practices that will enable students to achieve those goals, and the incorporates the pathway’s action plan for how to change how professional learning is experienced.

Recommendation

Based on the instructional needs of students, and the research which supports effective instruction, The District is recommending a three year plan which focuses on the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention.

The District will implement this plan over the next three school years and will include:

- A focused and cohesive two hour PRP for all professional staff that builds off of prior knowledge
- An adjustment to our New Teacher Induction Program to include a focus on Marzano’s high yield instructional strategies and other essential instructional expectations
- Full-day professional learning days that will be focused on curricular competencies identified by instructional leaders and curriculum supervisors. These competencies include specific topics such as, but not limited to Text Dependent Analysis, Guided Reading, and Assessment Literacy, but also includes deepening understanding and familiarity with newly adopted curriculum resources
- Half-day professional learning days will be focused more at the building level to address building-level specific needs. This professional learning will be focused on building-level learning plans, cultural proficiency, goals established through Superintendent reports, and required state mandated trainings such as PSSA/Keystone Test administration, Act 71 and Act 126.





Annual Report

- Act 71 - Provides educators with four (4) hours of professional development in youth suicide awareness and prevention every five (5) years for professional educators in grades six through twelve as outlined in Act 71
- Act 126 - Provides educators with mandated reporter training, totaling 3 hours, every 5 years
- Professional Learning Communities (PLC's)
- Intentional Unit Upgrades
- Continued exploration into Marzano high yield instructional strategies
- Lesson study protocol and enhanced peer communication and feedback to improve practice
- Assessment Literacy
- Provide opportunities for staff to go deeper in an area of professional learning specific to their own needs, goals, and interests

Communication of a more detailed multi-year professional plan framework will be shared with the District's academic leadership team during the June 2017 leadership days. At that time, feedback will be collected, and necessary revisions will be made to the professional learning plan. A multi-year professional learning plan will be presented to the Superintendent, and shared with the Board of School Directors in July 2017.



Exploration	Community Engagement Management System
Originated from	Spirit of Community
Additional Pathway Connections	   

Background

Successful community engagement programs require a strategic, systematic approach to collecting, utilizing and maximizing stakeholder data. During the strategic planning process, planning team members recognized the extraordinary community resources available in the Lower Merion community and the opportunity to draw from these resources to enhance the LMSD experience – specifically, engaging skilled and knowledgeable volunteers; fostering more sustained, meaningful connections with alumni and community members; and cultivating financial support beyond traditional tax revenues.

Over the past year, the District convened a group of stakeholders via the Spirit of Community Pathway Team representing the Lower Merion/Harriton Alumni Association, Education Foundation of Lower Merion, Home and School associations, Interschool Council and District staff in a series of conversations to take an inventory of existing engagement practices and to review needs moving forward. It quickly became apparent that there are numerous shared goals and needs among and between each group, yet groups have been operating independently and in many cases duplicating efforts – particularly with regard to data collection and management and other functions ranging from communications/marketing to event planning. In turn, the groups determined that by working and planning together – through a process managed centrally (via the District) -- there would be an opportunity to increase efficiencies and maximize outcomes.

Current Situation

Several recent developments have increased the sense of urgency around this initiative:

Volunteer Management

The District is currently experiencing extensive new demands with regard to volunteer data management due to new state regulations around clearances and background checks. The Human Resources receives/processes all clearance information and has processed more than 1000 clearances processed to date (up to 2000 interactions with community members since start of school year).

School staff, HSAs handle occasional volunteer inquiries at school level for school-based events, but there is no consistency of practices by school; in many cases, this process is a major responsibility for HSA parent leaders.

Additional/related challenges include:

- Volunteer information currently maintained in excel spreadsheets, no coordinated/integrated method for communicating volunteer clearance status to District staff
- Clearance information is not readily searchable at school level, must be provided upon request
- No self-service portal for prospective volunteers
- No system for schools to communicate volunteer opportunities and needs
- Each set of volunteer clearances must be processed manually; often multiple items arrive at different times, requiring extensive, ongoing maintenance of individual files
- No way to track volunteer assignments, hours and performance



Community Resource Network

The District launched a Community Resource Network to connect staff with experts in the community around curricular needs. This group has been operating in an ad hoc manner and records are being maintained through an Excel spreadsheet. There is no system in place to solicit and track experts/volunteers.

Alumni Records

The Alumni Association has been unable to update more than 45,000 alumni records for the past several years due to its research vendor filing for bankruptcy. As a result, all files are maintained on an excel spreadsheet and updated ad hoc when alumni contact the alumni association president. This situation has impacted the Education Foundation; EFLM has been unable to generate an annual appeal due to the loss of accurate alumni records.

Additional Needs

The District, Home & School Associations, ISC and Education Foundation have been utilizing independent systems for communicating news and information, managing event payments/registration, online donations and basic transactions. Data therefore exists in a variety of formats and locations and stakeholders are forced to become familiar with and utilize a variety of different tools. This leads to user confusion and frustration and has the potential to diminish engagement and participation. Because data is not integrated, it cannot easily be shared and analyzed to assess how community members are interacting with/responding to/participating in District events, activities and initiatives. This is important if the District hopes to cultivate and strengthen relationships with its stakeholders.





Recommendation

The group researched the practices of a number organizations, including school districts, private schools and universities to determine what next steps might be helpful in coordinating shared needs around community engagement. Ultimately, the most successful community engagement and development programs are fully-staffed, core functions of the organization. Responsibilities like volunteer management, alumni relations and fundraising are often grouped within an Office of Advancement and driven by a cohesive development strategy.

For LMSD, many of these roles are handled by volunteers/volunteer organizations and are viewed as peripheral functions for the school District. However, there are immediate needs and opportunities related to these roles that can be served with effective use of existing staffing and strategic infrastructure investments. One consistent theme/immediate priority across the current inventory of needs is the effective collection and use of data. Throughout the year, the group participated in conference calls, online demonstrations and planning meetings to conduct reviews of a variety of standalone products designed to address individual needs as well as (more costly) solutions designed to address multiple needs.

The group narrowed its search after determining that Raiser's Edge, a CRM product of Blackbaud, Inc, could almost all of the most pressing data needs. Raiser's Edge is a solution that can integrate various kinds of valuable data and enable customized uses and access based on the needs of each group. Instead of needing 10-15 different products (volunteer management, e-news, Excel, etc.) across multiple schools and District functions, information can be consolidated into one data management system. The group recommends moving forward with a plan to implement Raiser's Edge as the core of its Community Engagement Management System.



Exploration	Community Resource Network
Originated from	Spirit of Community
Additional Pathway Connections	   

Background

Lower Merion School District’s strategic plan calls for building school-community partnerships that maximize and value the resources of our diverse community, leveraging the expertise of the community to enhance learning opportunities and experiences and launching a strategic development program that encompasses alumni engagement and the pursuit of alternative revenue sources. These are goals that would benefit from consistent advice and engagement from experts and interested residents. In turn the District wishes to engage a “Community Resource Network (CRN)” – a group of community members who have offered to share their expertise, connections and skills to support our schools per the priorities of the District’s strategic plan.

Current Situation

A CRN Advisory Board has been formed and has been meeting as part of the Board’s Communications & Community Engagement Committee to discuss and pilot how a formal CRN might function. The group has already helped to connect students with community experts. Among the connections made: a gaming expert is providing mentorship to a team of Harriton students on a historical board game; a publisher is working with a student who developed a Latin-themed coloring book; a middle school teacher is working with a Federal Judge to augment a civics lesson; the Harriton/LM music label produced a concert with a famous alumnus to launch the winter sports season.

The Advisory Board has also provided guidance and insights on the District’s efforts to develop a community engagement system. The District has consulted with members of the Advisory Board who represent institutions like the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University and local independent schools for recommendations on data management tools and development strategy.

The group is also reviewing the needs of other Pathway Teams; the District is compiling an inventory of community requests from each Pathway Team to support plan initiatives. The work of the CRN Advisory Board has shown the potential of a larger CRN. There is a need to systematize the Advisory Board’s roles as well as the roles, responsibilities and scope of work of the larger CRN.

Recommendation

The District seeks to develop a CRN made up of community members representing an array of disciplines and interest. Members of the network will be solicited through an open application process managed by the District’s communications committee and CRN Advisory Board.

An application form will be available on the District website. Interested community members will be asked to provide a brief statement as to why they wish to serve and their qualifications. The School Board community engagement committee and current CRN Advisory Board will review applications. Approximately 12-15 people will initially serve on the CRN Advisory Board for a one year term.



CRN Advisory Board members will meet regularly (initially, once per quarter during the school year) with District representatives. The group will review priority items presented by the District and discuss areas/issues/challenges/opportunities where external support may be beneficial. CRN Advisory Board members will also be responsible for:

- Sharing new and interesting ideas in their disciplines that may be applicable to the school environment
- Soliciting support of colleagues and friends to serve as a larger group of Volunteers (see description below)
- Compiling a comprehensive database of Volunteers in various disciplines
- Develop an annual event to highlight coordinated efforts between the CRN and District

Interested community members may also choose to volunteer on an as-needed basis for their input and expertise, to support a specific school, staff or student initiative. The District will maintain a comprehensive list of volunteers by field, discipline and area of interest. To apply, stakeholders will complete the CRN application and click on “Volunteer” instead of “CRN Advisory Board Member” as the desired role.

The District will provide staff with the opportunity to request CRN support via an online application process developed by the Communications Committee. The District will connect CRN Advisory Board members and volunteers with staff members if an opportunity for connection, support, etc. exists. The District will identify priority items and update task force members throughout the year as these items change.



<i>Exploration</i>	Recess at the Elementary School	K-5
<i>Originated from</i>	Research & Development Team - Subcommittee	

Background and Current Practice

At the conclusion of the 2015-16 school year, each elementary school in Lower Merion organized recess and lunch around a fifty (50) minute block. Lower Merion conforms to established best practice by providing recess first followed by lunch (Rainville, 2009). Recess time is a block of 20-22 minutes and the lunch period is 25 minutes. The variance of 3-5 minutes is a function of the time it takes to get students from the recess grounds to the lunchroom. The small variation in recess time is dictated by factors that are facility related including the size and complexity of the play area and the proximity of the recess grounds to the lunchroom. However, the total recess time for students varies only by a few minutes. For the 2015-16 school year, each elementary school had one outside recess for elementary students. In addition, all elementary students have a block of 60 (sixty) minutes of physical education (PE) during the week. Depending on the schedule, that PE period can occupy one large block or two smaller blocks. Teachers have the flexibility to bring students outside for an activity period or learning project.

Research Overview

In pursuit of the recommendations in this paper, a large body of research on recess and play was reviewed. A bibliography of the research reviewed is found at the end of the whitepaper submitted to the Board. Recess and play represent "...an essential planned respite from rigorous cognitive tasks". (Pediatrics, 183) The Council on School Health of the American Academy of Pediatrics finds that "... recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child’s development..." (Pediatrics, 183) The frequency and duration of recess **breaks** should be sufficient to allow the student to mentally decompress. (Pediatrics, 186 – emphasis added) The Center for Disease Control supports multiple breaks in the school day. Research on play in the school day consistently shows that children who have physical activity breaks are more attentive and better able to perform cognitively (Ramstetter, 519). In addition, recess helps children to develop social skills that are not acquired in the more structured classroom environment (Ramstetter, 519). In the structured day of our elementary students, recess now becomes the last vestige of unstructured play in a child’s day.

The research studies presented at the end of this paper document that recess and play can improve a child’s attention to academic tasks and enhance learning. That unstructured play break also adds important opportunity for other kinds of learning.

Recommendations

Based on both research and anecdotal evidence, the recommendations begin with a change in paradigm. Recess (including physical activity) must be considered the fourth R in the curriculum. In adopting this important approach, recess becomes an indispensable part of the school day. As such, recess should be protected as a block of student time - as important to student learning as math and language arts.

- 1. Add a 15-minute Physical Activity period for elementary students during the school day.** To account for some of the important, research based, advantages to physical activity, Lower Merion should implement a second Physical Activity (PA) period embedded in the elementary (Grades 1-5) school day. Penn Valley Elementary School has piloted this PA period. I recommend the District adopt the program/process that Penn Valley has used to create this period at all elementary



schools for the remainder of this school year. Each grade level in elementary schools would identify a fifteen (15) minute block that fits into their schedule, in consultation with the principal, where students can engage in physical activity of their choice. This period can and should be an opportunity for students to be outside. However, teachers and grade levels may exercise discretion based on factors such as daily schedule, outside temperature and/or weather conditions to hold that period inside – either in the individual classroom or together in a large group space. Programs such as “Go Noodle” or other activity based programs can be used to allow students movement over the scheduled 15 minute block. This recommendation extends for the remainder of this school year. As this school year ends, Lower Merion should survey students, teachers and parents on the efficacy of this additional PA period. For future school years, the results of this survey will help guide the implementation of a PA period.

2. **The Recess and PA period should not be used as a punishment.** Recess should be considered an essential part of the school day. Therefore, recess should not be used as a punishment for classroom academic or behavior transgression. While there should be discretion for recess staff to use limited recess time to redirect **individual** misbehavior that occurs at recess, it should be used infrequently and for short duration. When recess is used as a punishment for more than half of the recess period, that punishment should be reported to the school principal and either the principal or the classroom teacher should report that discipline consequence to the parent.
3. **The threshold temperature for outside recess should be reviewed.** Elementary principals should meet to create a uniform policy on the temperature thresholds for access to outside play. It is recommended that these temperature thresholds, accounting for wind chills and a discussion of weather conditions – be lowered. For outside air temperatures in the 20’s, consider splitting the recess period to allow for some time outside and some time inside. Consideration should also be given to weather conditions. The variance in outside play areas among elementary schools will dictate a variation in access when weather conditions – snow and rain – affect outside play. Feedback on this recommendation across staff and parent interactions raised a concern that some students are not properly dressed for cold weather. A change in the temperature thresholds for outside play should be carefully communicated to parents and schools should collaborate with parents and Home and School Associations for a bank of coats, hats and gloves for students who come to school unprepared for outside recess.
4. **Lower Merion should continue training for Recess Staff based on the Responsive Classroom Model.** During the summer of 2016, recess staff was invited to an in-service that introduced staff to the tenets of Responsive Classroom. That training should be ongoing and offered, at least, twice during the school year. The ability to gather recess staff and discuss student behavior, consequences and adult language will help to support the first and second recommendation.
5. **Physical Activity can be augmented by programs that occur before and after school.** Each of our elementary schools sponsors programs for students that encourage activity. These include intramural programs, walking clubs and running clubs. In addition to existing programs, elementary schools should consider these other options:
 - An AM Recess period. Merion Elementary School allows students to access outdoor play prior to the school day. This outdoor activity period should be considered at each of the elementary schools.
 - Increasing the frequency of before and after school contacts for intramural activities and walking/running clubs.



<i>Exploration</i>	Mindfulness within the Schools			
<i>Originated from</i>	Research & Development Team - Subcommittee			

Background

The practice of Mindfulness has advocates and practitioners across the Lower Merion School District. In June, 2016, the school District formed this taskforce to examine the practice of Mindfulness as it exists, now, in Lower Merion. In addition, this taskforce is charged as follows:

1. To examine the research on Mindfulness, centering on the best available empirical research and peer-reviewed scholarship to determine the benefit of incorporating Mindful Practices as a strategy in our schools. The initial research will enable the taskforce to construct a *white paper* that includes a definition of mindfulness, a summary of the research, and an evidence-based approach to implementation in schools.
2. To search for schools and school organizations that have systematized the practice of mindfulness in their schools/organizations. Once identified, to pick a representative sample of these schools/organizations to study and potentially visit with the intent to draw from their experiences.
3. To develop an evidence-based recommendation for developing a Lower Merion approach to Mindfulness.

The Mindfulness Taskforce may work in collaboration with the Strategic Planning Leadership Team and the Research and Development (R&D) Team. The taskforce will begin its work in the spring of 2016 with an introductory meeting and, thereafter, will work through the Fall of 2016 with the goal of presenting both the *White Paper* and recommendation to the Strategic Planning Leadership Team in June, 2017.

Progress

The Taskforce continues to meet monthly to examine empirical and scholarly research to determine the benefits of incorporating mindfulness practices in our schools. The work has included a District-wide staff survey, observation of existing practices in the District, and study and/or observation of schools and organizations that have implemented mindfulness practices.

Whitepaper: will include a definition of mindfulness, a summary of the research and recommendations for an evidence based approach to implementation in schools. As there are differences in both research and practice of mindfulness between children and adults, some recommendations will be specific for staff and others for the school aged population.

A Case and Place for Students in the Lower Merion School District

Social and emotional well-being has a significant impact on educational outcomes (Elias, Wang, Weissber, Zins, & Walberg, 2002). Students are faced with increasing levels of trauma and stress related disorders. Trauma and stress affect the general health and well-being of a significant number of students, and highlight the need for school based stress reduction programs.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), behavioral problems, ADHD, depression and anxiety are now the most prevalent diagnoses. Additionally, 21% of 13-18 year olds in the United States have or had been diagnosed with a mental disorder (Merikangas et al., 2010). Mindfulness based interventions proved to be an effective way for individuals to deal with their health and wellness: reducing stress, increasing well-being, strengthening immune functions (Davidson et al., 2003), improving personal development including empathy, perspective taking, and self-care (Shapiro et al., 1998, 2007; Birnie et al, 2010), as well as increasing attention (Jha et al., 2007, Sauer et al., 2012). A study published by *Mindfulness* found that mindfulness based programs introduced for both pre- and early adolescents, improved individual's



optimism, ability to externalize behavior, and self-concept (Schonert-Reich, 2010). Another study published in the *Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience* found adolescents who attended 2-hour mindfulness classes for 8 weeks received substantial benefits in the areas of stress, anxiety, self-esteem, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, interpersonal sensitivity, and depressive symptoms (Hotzel, et. al 2007).

Students spend much of their childhood in school. Mindfulness practices support Lower Merion’s vision to address the many academic, social, emotional, and physical challenges that our students’ experience, while aligning with our District’s personal, cultural, and global transformative goals. More specifically, by incorporating mindfulness based programs into our District, “Learners will make informed choices that support the physical, social, and emotional health and well-being of self, community, and society.”



Mindfulness programs and practices have been implemented in districts around the country (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Conferences, workshops, institutions, certifications, and publications, have been rapidly increasing, driving educators to improve school-based learning and the social and emotional outcomes of our lifelong learners. By implementing mindfulness based approaches in the Lower Merion School District, student’s emotional well-being will improve, resulting in higher academic achievement today, and successful leaders tomorrow. Burke (2009) suggests that mindfulness can provide:

- Increased emotional regulation
- Increased social skills
- Increased ability to orient attention
- Increased working memory and planning and organization
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased quality of sleep
- Decreased test anxiety
- Decreased ADHD behaviors- hyperactivity and impulsivity
- Decreased negative affect and emotions
- Decreased anxiety and depression
- Fewer Conduct and anger management problems

Recommendation

Stress is inevitable in our community however we can change our response to stress to mitigate adverse health outcomes and improve emotional well-being. Lower Merion School District is committed to the health and wellness of our students and employees. In order to respond healthfully to the increasing number of stressors present in our world, the Mindfulness Taskforce Committee proposes that we begin to include mindfulness based practices into our District. These practices will support the District’s global transformative goals, increasing the emotional health and well-being of our school community, and cultivating a new awareness to the relationships between ones’ thoughts, feelings, and sensations, resulting in more mindful, emotionally intelligent students and staff members. Specific recommended models will be forth coming as the committee finalizes its recommendations by June 2017.



Exploration	Adolescent Sleep and School Start Times	  
Originated from	Research & Development Team - Subcommittee	

Background

Adolescent sleep deprivation has become a critical issue for many public health policy advocates. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [American Medical Association](#), and the [Center for Disease Control](#) have all released position statements in support of improving adolescent sleep health through, among other strategies, delaying middle and high school start times until 8:30 AM or later. As part of the Research and Development arm of the District’s work to implement *All Forward*, a task force has been formed to gather information pertinent for considering later start times for LMSD middle and high schools.

The work of this taskforce is building from previous community and District initiatives to examine this issue:

- **ISC Study and Report.** The Interschool Council (ISC) initiated a committee to explore the topic, which produced a report made available through the ISC web page on the LMSD website. Amy Norr, Juli Gruber-May, Ellen Keefe, and Heather Marg-Bracken were the members of this committee and remain active advocates of healthy sleep and school start times in the District and in the region through a coalition of community, District administration, and school board representatives from about ten school districts in the Southeastern PA region.
- **Speaker.** A presentation by Dr. Judith Owen, Director of Sleep Medicine at Boston Children’s Hospital and an internationally recognized authority on children and sleep, was delivered to the LMSD community at an event co-sponsored by the ISC and LMSD on March 31, 2014. A video recording of the 87-minute presentation, “Sleep and the Teenage Brain” is available on the LMSD website. Following this presentation, Dr. Owen later made another public presentation in the Radnor School District.
- **High School Student Survey.** A survey was administered to all high school students in June 2015. The electronic survey was created by the Interschool Council Committee on Sleep and School Start Times and was delivered to students by the high school principals. The response rate was about 50% (approximately 1,200 students).
- **Transportation Study.** A study by School Bus Consultants was commissioned by the Board of Directors in Fall 2016 and explores the impact of three alternative bell schedules on the transportation needs of the District. A final report of findings is expected soon.

Current Situation

The current bell schedules for the District are as follows:

- High School - 7:30 AM - 2:40 PM
- Middle Schools - 8:20 AM - 3:05 PM
- Elementary Schools - 9:00 AM - 3:35 PM
 - AM Kindergarten 9:00 AM - 11:50 AM
 - PM Kindergarten 12:45 AM - 3:35 PM



The Sleep and School Start Time R & D Committee is charged with examining together the key information from research, practice, and the LMSD context that will be needed for further consideration of delayed school start times. They have met three times beginning December 2016, and through this group the following has been accomplished:

- Gathered relevant informational resources and empirical research
- Examined the impact of delayed schedules on LMSD extra-curricular activities and, most prominently, athletics
- Discussed preliminary findings from the transportation study
- Connected with expert researchers and school leaders who have made the change to gather lessons learned and strategies for addressing logistical challenges
- Identified community partners who would be affected by schedule changes
- Examined the bell schedules for schools in the surrounding region

Recommendations

The goal of the taskforce is to prepare an informational brief for the Superintendent and Board of Directors for delivery in Fall 2017. In addition, we recommend the development of a communications plan to share information in a way that will broaden and deepen the community's understanding of research surrounding adolescent sleep deprivation, family and community strategies for combatting sleep deprivation, and the logistical challenges and potential solutions for changing school start times.



TEAM MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

STRATEGIC PLAN LEADERSHIP

To realize and operationalize a strategic plan as ambitious as the Lower Merion School District's **All Forward** plan, a commitment from many people in our school community is necessary. Rooted in strong support from the Board of School Directors and Superintendent Robert Copeland, the District administration and staff has collectively worked toward moving the District toward the goals of the plan. We are deeply thankful to the many people who have devoted time, energy, and resources in serving as members on our instrumental and active subcommittees. The members listed below have served as formal committee members during the 2016-2017 school year and have been tremendous contributors to realizing our plan. We also thank the many people, most not listed below, who served on the original steering committee in the plan's formation and the numerous professionals within Lower Merion School District who, on a day-to-day basis, work to bring the plan to life in our schools and classrooms.

Strategic Plan Coordinators

- Ms. Megan Shafer, Senior Director of Policy, Personnel, and School Programs
- Dr. Scott Eveslage, Assistant Superintendent
- Mr. Jason Potten, Principal at Bala Cynwyd Middle School

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- Mr. Doug Young, Director of Communications and Outreach

ALL FORWARD

STRATEGIC PATHWAYS FOR

LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT

