

Douglas School Improvement Plan
2015-16



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The Douglas School Council generally meets every six weeks. This past year, we met on the following dates:

October 14th

January 13th

March 17th

May 26th

Part One: Progress with Goals for 2014-2015

The following list includes this past year' s Rationale, Responsible Parties, Strategies, Measurable Outcomes, Target Completion Dates, Assessment of Progress, Assessment Instruments, Anticipated Costs, and Source of Revenues for our two stated goals.

Goal for 2014-2015

The Douglas staff and School Council agreed on one overarching goal for the upcoming school year and a second more specific goal for 4th grade based on MCAS. Teachers, staff and the Douglas School community focused on identifying and implementing pedagogy that supports our school vision and promotes the skills associated with creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Our specific goal for 4th grade was to improve the performance of our High Needs students in math and language arts.

Our goals were tied to the already established system-wide goals found in the Long Range Strategic Plan:

- Preparing students by providing them with the knowledge, and intellectual and reflective skills they will need to thrive in an increasingly complex world.
- Review and articulate what all students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

Goal Statement #1: Identify and implement pedagogy that supports our school vision and promotes the skills associated with creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Rationale:

The current model for schools was designed over 100 years ago. The purpose was to create a population ready for the industrial revolution. Industry required an “educated” population who could follow directions, read instructions, and enter as a trainable workforce.¹

The purpose of education today is to prepare a population to enter the “innovation economy.”² Today, students must do more than simply recite inert knowledge - they must transform it. Learning requires a teacher to be more than a classroom manager who transmits the subject matter to passive students. At Douglas school our vision is to foster joy, bravery, wonder, and pride in our students. Our students must see themselves as a valuable part of the class and the learning experience. They must be able to contribute original ideas, they must know what it means to be innovative, and practice entrepreneurial skills.

Our aim for the next century must be the inclusion of all children regardless of learning needs, the integration of subjects via problem-focused experiences, and the integration of the school and the world via field-work, service learning, and the active pursuit of real world problems. *In this new world, content is easily accessible via the internet and so what really matters is how students react to it, shape it, apply it and transform it.*

What will our students do in school? They will work in diverse teams to build robots, roller coasters, gardens and human powered machines. They will write field guides and illustrated history books or maybe a children’s astronomy picture book. They will work collaboratively to solve real problems that matter to them – what can we do to stop the geese from pooping on our playground, how can we store our jackets and satisfy the fire department, or make sure that no one misses the bus? They might also produce original plays, films or spoken word events on adolescent issues, children of the 1800’s, lost cigar factories, or social problems they face on a day-to-day basis.

¹ "Rethinking Education, Part I : Why Our School System Is ..." 2013. 11 May. 2014
<<http://www.geopolitics.us/why-our-school-system-is-broken/>>

² Schumpeter, Joseph Alois. *The theory of economic development: An inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle*. Transaction Publishers, 1934.

Responsible Parties

Principal, all grade level teachers and special educators will work as members of teams working to identify and implement engaging problem based projects and pedagogy .

Strategies

1. Study successful models of problem based instruction from resources such as High Tech High, The Center for Expeditionary Learning, and iterate models implemented at Douglas in the 2013-14 school year .
2. Design school based professional development, collaborative teams, and administrative support for teachers to “tune” projects.
3. Inform parents and community of changes and additions

Define Outcomes

1. Clearly communicate pedagogical approach to community
2. Design and implement three Problem Based Instruction projects for each classroom
3. Work with the SPED instructors to provide increased in class instruction
4. Implement an increased level of personalized instruction
5. Identify and implement effective technology solutions to support problem based and greater personalized instruction
6. Implement electronic portfolio accessible to students and parents that will allow weekly updates of information and communication - this may replace or enhance our current report card system

Target Completion Date

June, 2015

Costs \$2000

Professional Development for teachers

Assessment of Progress

1. Clearly communicate pedagogical approach to community - We began this year with summer letters, group meetings and even book study groups for parents. These were all designed to help families understand the pedagogical shift and philosophy for Douglas School.
2. Design and implement three Problem Based Instruction projects for each classroom - These were called Exhibitions. Douglas School teachers hosted three Exhibitions for each classroom. The first, in December had an attendance of over 700 students, parents and community members. Students presented an exhibition of their work that ranged from kindergarten interviews of “Douglas School Helpers” and First grade weather forecasts and an interactive weather “Museum” to Fifth grade showcases of how colonial settlers moved from survival to Society. The Exhibitions included

building projects, models of animals found in our wetlands, maps from a variety of perspectives, plays and even presentations on how to build habitats that provide for populations of Monarch Butterflies.

Two more Exhibitions were held in each class. Each began with a question and served as evidence of student understanding and skills. The final Exhibition will be held throughout the day on June 11th. Each of these exhibitions has been deemed an outstanding success and showcase the creative, innovative and academic skills of the students.

3. Work with the SPED instructors to provide increased in class instruction - The Special Education Department in grades 4-6 worked diligently to provide instruction and support in classrooms where appropriate. We identified problems with the model and look forward to being able to address those problems with the addition of Special Education staff this coming year.

4. Implement an increased level of personalized instruction - This is an area of improvement to be carried over into the coming School Improvement Plan. Personalized instruction is an approach being called for by many school reformers and we have yet to identify an effective model that encompasses the teaching of Common Core Curriculum and the individual, differentiated instruction that we know will be good for all students.

5. Identify and implement effective technology solutions to support problem based and greater personalized instruction - The addition of Chromebooks in 4th and 5th grade allowed teachers to begin to organize their instruction in such a way that made use of student access to information, collaboration and organizational tools of the Google platform and individualized instruction for students. At best, this was an exploratory year and we look forward to implementing more of the tools available to us in coming years.

6. Implement electronic portfolio accessible to students and parents that will allow weekly updates of information and communication - this may replace or enhance our current report card system. Experiments in 4th grade began to uncover the power of regular parental access to student work via the Google platform. Parents were not quick to use this and we realize that it will be a paradigm shift for us. We began the formation of an electronic portfolio template and hope to expand its use next year. Progress reporting has changed in 4th grade to reflect our new pedagogy and we hope to expand this experimentation into other grades next year.

Goal Statement #2: Improve student performance on MCAS math and language arts for all students and specifically high needs students in grade 4.

Rationale:

Our High needs students did not meet CPPI for Spring MCAS 2014 in math.

Responsible Parties

Principal, all 4th grade level teachers and special educators will work as members of teams to identify and implement instruction designed to improve student understanding of math and language arts concepts .

Strategies

1. Implementation of ST math - Created by MIND Research Institute, ST Math is game-based instructional software for K-12 and is designed to boost math comprehension and proficiency through visual learning. Integrating with classroom instruction, ST Math incorporates the latest research in learning and the brain and promotes mastery-based learning and mathematical understanding. Teachers will receive professional development and implement ST Math in addition to current use of EveryDay Math curriculum
2. Language Arts - Teachers will implement new writing rubrics and guidelines to address three types of writing at 4th grade - opinion, narrative and informational writing. The rubrics were developed throughout the district last year and will be implemented for full use this year as a means of improving student writing.

Target Completion Date

June, 2015

Costs \$2000

ST Math curriculum - School budget

Assessment of Progress

1. Implementation of ST math - Teachers in grades 4 and 5 integrated ST Math with classroom instruction. Teachers received a small amount of professional development and worked with students to use ST Math for 90 minutes per week. Student responses to the program were generally positive, except for some difficulties with the technology use at homes that interfered with school use. Analysis of the success of the program will wait until the MCAS results. We look forward to using the program for a second year, increasing the professional development opportunities and expanding to 6th grade. Anecdotally, the students in one 4th grade class surveyed reported that they were able to perform better in EveryDay Math curriculum and were more familiar with content questions on the MCAS because of their work in ST Math.
2. Language Arts - Teachers implemented new writing rubrics and guidelines to address three types of writing at 4th grade - opinion, narrative and informational writing.

The rubrics were developed throughout the district last year and were implemented for full use this year as a means of improving student writing. Teacher analysis of student writing showed improved performance throughout the year. Complete analysis will be completed with the release of MCAS testing data.

Part Two: Goals for 2015-2016

The Douglas staff and School Council agreed on two overarching goal for the upcoming school year. Our Teachers, staff and the Douglas School community understand that we must continue to adapt and implement pedagogy that supports our school vision and promotes the skills associated with creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. The work that we began in year one needs to be refined and improved to include more differentiation and personalization. We also need to explore effective methods for addressing Common Core Standards through Problem Based Instruction resulting in exhibitions of students work.

Our second all school goal focuses on social and emotional health of our students and the exploration of the practiced of the Responsive Classroom curriculum.

Our goals are tied to the already established system-wide goals found in the Long Range Strategic Plan:

1. Preparing students by providing them with the knowledge, and intellectual and reflective skills they will need to thrive in an increasingly complex world.
2. Meet the diverse needs of all students by promoting social emotional learning and physical well-being through increased student-adult and student-student interactions.

Goal Statement #1: Adapt and continue to implement pedagogy that supports our school vision and promotes the skills associated with creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Rationale:

The driver of the model that we are working to develop is that the fundamental task of school is to facilitate learning. The challenge is to create and sustain conditions and experiences in school where students will want and be able to learn. The problem facing us is not that students can not learn, but how they are required to learn. We are working to move away from a model in which students sit passively while the teacher instructs, explains, and sets assignments. In this model, inevitably, students grasp some material more quickly than others, but the class is intended to get through the material at the same rate and over the same amount of time. We are trying to move away from the narrow confines of conformity to systems that are personalized to the real abilities of every student. We need to increase the opportunities for teachers to take account of student differences in how they teach different students. As Ken Robinson suggests, “Raising individual achievement in schools means engaging students as individuals and not prescribing a standard steeplechase for everyone to compete at the same time in the same way.”³ In this second year of work, we will focus professional development and teacher learning on differentiation and personalization for student instruction within the model of Problem Based Learning and exhibitions of student work.

Responsible Parties

Principal, all grade level teachers and special educators will work as members of teams working to identify and implement engaging problem based projects and pedagogy .

Strategies

1. Review curriculum for opportunities of personalization and differentiation .
2. Design school based professional development, collaborative teams, and administrative support for teachers to “tune” projects and instruction to support personalization and differentiation.
3. Explore technologies to support differentiation and personalization
4. Inform parents and community of changes and additions

Define Outcomes

³ Robinson, K., & Aronica, L. (2015). Natural Born Leaders. In Creative schools: The grassroots revolution that's transforming education (p. 90). New York, NY: Viking.

1. Clearly communicate pedagogical approach to community
2. Design and implement three Problem Based Instruction projects for each classroom that include elements of differentiation and personalization
3. Work with the SPED instructors to provide increased in class instruction
4. Implement an increased level of personalized instruction using technology solutions
6. Implement electronic portfolio accessible to students and parents that will allow weekly updates of information and communication - this may replace or enhance our current report card system

Target Completion Date

Costs \$1000

June, 2016

Professional Development for teachers

Goal Statement #2: Explore the adoption of Responsive Classroom approach as an evidence-based social and emotional learning program to improve school climate.

Rationale:

Over the past ten years, the Douglas School has approached improved social and emotional learning through a variety of curricula, school designed programs and activities. We are looking for a unified approach that will be used throughout the school year, will utilize common language throughout the school, will engage teachers and students, and compliment the pedagogical changes that we have begun. The *Responsive Classroom* approach is a promising way of teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth while building a strong and safe school community.

From their website, The Responsive Classroom approach is described as “A general approach to teaching, rather than a program designed to address a specific school issue. It is based on the premise that children learn best when they have both academic and social-emotional skills. The Responsive Classroom approach consists of a set of practices that build academic and social-emotional competencies and that can be used along with many other programs.”

These classroom practices are:

- **Morning Meeting**—gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead

- **Rule Creation**—helping students create classroom rules to ensure an environment that allows all class members to meet their learning goals
- **Interactive Modeling**—teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique
- **Positive Teacher Language**—using words and tone as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline
- **Logical Consequences**—responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity
- **Guided Discovery**—introducing classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility
- **Academic Choice**—increasing student learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work
- **Classroom Organization**—setting up the physical room in ways that encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity
- **Working with Families**—creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches
- **Collaborative Problem Solving**—using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students

Responsible Parties

Principal, all grade level teachers and special educators will work as members of teams working to implement the beginning aspects of the Responsive Classroom approach .

Strategies

1. Teach several professional staff about the philosophy and the practices listed above at either a one day or two day training
2. Use Professional Development days to familiarize the entire staff with specific approaches.
3. Implement approaches in the classroom
4. Review with all staff the approaches, how they are working and what aspects have positive effects, what needs revision for our model and decide whether to move forward with further training and implementation over the course of several years

Defined Outcomes:

1. Use of Morning Meeting, Rule Creation, Interactive Modeling, and Positive Teacher Language in each classroom
2. School staff meetings to share and discuss the approach

3. Identification of further aspects to implement and further trainings that would benefit the Douglas Community

Target Completion Date

Costs \$1700

June, 2016

Professional Development for teachers