

School Improvement Plan

Narrative Overview

Bryant Montessori PreK-8 Program

2010-11

Principal, Claudia Mason

Historically, Bryant Montessori has incrementally accrued a population of students reflecting mostly all-city neighborhoods, rather than the “Hilltop Neighborhood” which narrowly surrounds Bryant. The Title I status was eliminated due to higher income demographics driving enrollment, as opposed to neighborhood children receiving priority enrollment communication and opportunities. Currently, only 23% of students attending Bryant live within eight blocks surrounding the school. It is for this reason that I began taking steps during the 2009-2010 school year to work closely with nearby schools, neighborhood families, churches, community organizations and potential supporters focused on enriching the diversity of Bryant by communicating the need to substantiate the foundational mission of our school with Hilltop community a)access and b)equity through a shift in our enrollment process. I believe that a close partnership with Hilltop school will foster the necessary collaboration needed to ensure that every child thrives within a learning program offering optimal learning driven by high expectations.

Continuous Improvement Process and Stakeholder Participation

Identify the strengths and weakness that you will be addressing

1. Montessori strategies offer a depth of preK-3rd grade substantiation of basic skills needed to skillfully enter the intermediate grades.
 2. Currently, despite a fundamental belief in Montessori strategies and values fostering a climate centered on peaceful interactions we are working to achieve consistency of practice related to learning standards and goals.
- Specify priorities and concerns for improving student achievement and meeting state’s academic standards
 1. In Math, integrating Montessori strategies with Math Expressions
 2. In Reading (literacy), integrating reading and writing, based on literature based classroom learning. Assessments: Running Records, Conferences.

Our students' progress in Reading reflects a program which was not focused enough on comprehension strategies related to integrating reading and writing. Our students are making Adequate Yearly Progress in Reading. While third graders represented students showing growth in third grade, we did not achieve the expected outcome as measured by fourth and fifth grade assessments. This is an area of focus this year. We expect higher achievement levels for the 2011 assessments given an all-school celebration of reading, writing, reflecting on and sharing a passion for reading all kinds of literature, including a new focus on non-fiction for struggling readers.

In the area of Mathematics, we are also struggling and not seeing the improvement expected. Our student performance as measured by the 2010 MSP did not meet targets in most grades. We are particularly concerned about middle school levels, given the need to prepare youth for high school Algebra, Geometry – and beyond. Formative and summative assessments, student led conferences with parents, individualized achievement conferences frequently held with students and frequent parent contact will increase achievement levels this year. Focusing in Algebra for all eighth graders will lead to an enhanced perspective of basic skills integrated into algebraic understanding. Professional development groups focused on engaging teachers in discussions of student work will increase instructional efficacy schoolwide.

- Describe how teachers have been included in assessment decisions to improve student performance
 1. During Waiver Days in August, our data was integral to conversations related to increasing student achievement. Math training focused on Math Expressions offered a strong introduction to instructional expectations in this content area. Montessori teachers strive to integrate all adoption strategies and timeline with hands-on classroom work. I believe that integrating the district resources with core Montessori learning strategies will lead to a higher level understanding of abstract and concrete mathematical reasoning.
 2. Reading:
 - Professional development and modeling Running Record assessments.
 - Staff book group focused on integrating reading and writing
 - Book leveling focus with support for all teachers
 - Organization of literature for equitable distribution of resources
 - Focus on loving literature with a variety of options for reflective writing and group discussion

Teachers are focused on differentiation of instruction at all times. Montessori strategies and organized work includes a focus on grade level expectations and

Review of Data to Establish Improvement

Achievement

Spring, 2010 MSP Data (expressed as percentage of students meeting standard):

Grade 3	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading	68	59	42	70	69
Mathematics	49	48	47	50	31

Grade 4	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading	77	86	63	59	67
Mathematics	46	41	49	25	24
Writing					

Grade 5	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading	54	42	72	81	73
Mathematics	39	50	54	51	41
Science					

Attendance
(Average Daily Attendance)

2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
90	89	93

- Include plans for connecting with preschool aged children (training and information to their parents)
 - A. PreK students attending Bryant: increased communication throughout the Summer months before school begins regarding norms, learning strategies which parents can practice at home, reading/writing/mathematics practice along with daily ways to enhance comprehension for parents.
 - B. PreK children who are not attending, but live in the Hilltop neighborhood: strong communication throughout this year about our program coupled with surveys giving us information which could lead to attaining scholarships or financial assistance for parents of preK children. It is my goal to foster close and collaborative relationships with community organizations/groups so that we can work together to ensure that all neighborhood children receive a Montessori preK beginning at Bryant if they choose, with our welcoming encouragement, to join us. The promise of attending a smaller school focused on high expectations and peaceful interactive strategies is equitable and just.
- Transition activities for preschool to kindergarten, 5th to 6th, and 8th to 9th

A preK-8 program offers transitional challenges as well as meaningful opportunities for growth at each level, as well as during the transitional phases. Our middle school leadership focus this year offers mentoring opportunities from the oldest youth at Bryant to the youngest; i.e. middle school students offer tutoring in reading, math, history and science to preK aged children. This fosters a strong sense of contribution through teaching academic skills, modeling social norms. Multi-age classrooms with three grade levels (preK-K, 1-3, etc.) offers the learner-worker-teacher levels fundamental to student growth and collaborative learning.

Discuss what you are doing to address the “whole child” during and after school:

The Montessori learning community fosters a focus on social and academic learning needs of children, based on responsibility, independence and contribution. The orderly classroom environment celebrates beauty and diversity through a “prepared environment” with learning challenges leading to abstract reasoning, enabling eventual concrete solutions. Our YMCA before and after school care continues learning and homework time.

- Identify parents and community partners that may be assisting in this aspect of your school program

Safe and Supportive Learning Environment

- Describe measures you are taking to accomplish this objective

A focus on cultural diversity and attaining strengths in this area, staff-wide.

The Bryant school staff is purposeful and intentional with work focused on creating a safe and supportive environment. Our core values are constantly shared: respect, responsibility and safety. Our staff believes in differentiated instruction aimed at meeting the current learning challenges and needs of each child. Expected behaviors as well as high level expectations drive all interactions between community members, adults as well as children. We are currently rethinking our responses to unproductive behaviors and social studies so that we will have a response plan in place by February which addresses disciplinary issues, but also focuses on keeping all children at school. (i.e. eliminating suspensions except for extreme instances related to safety of self and others).

We will begin the Compassionate Schools training in January.

I remind every school community member daily that we will: “care for ourselves, care for each other and care for this place.” This phrase is the fundamental promise and expectation which drives any level of intervention necessary to safely and peacefully interact. Children are reminded in a quiet and gentle voice to make good choices, assist their peers when needed and embrace diversity.

Equity Issues

- Describe how you are addressing the need for staff to become culturally competent

Our revised enrollment process is an important step, as we must prioritize our Hilltop children when offering a coveted place at Bryant (full, with a considerable wait list). The opportunity for every Hilltop family to embrace Bryant as their neighborhood school of choice reflects a renewed commitment to serving families within a high poverty socio-economic level. Scholarships for pre-school children will be key to building this necessary option for Hilltop families. If all Hilltop children choosing to attend Bryant at age three, with the promise of attaining a high level Bryant education through grade eights, were able to do so, I believe the we would drastically reduce the achievement gap in this area.

- Identify your achievement gap students and how you are addressing their needs
- Every teacher will bring a list of children who are not proficient in a subject to professional growth planning. Observations of teachers focus on this list, which is the basis of our work focused on the learning needs of students.

During classroom observations, I have the list of children who are not proficient in subject areas and review their current work, work easily found in folders/files in classrooms, and work directly with students focused on their instructional needs.

Every 5th grade student entering middle school receives a contract which is signed by parent and student. I meet with each family and discuss this compact/contract. (see attached). We discuss how important it is to be clear about academic and behavioral expectations. Montessori has unique characteristics, including the expectation that students will responsibly internalize the freedom of choice through the “work cycle” and self-driven selection of challenging work. Social norms are focused on contribution, respecting others at all times and maintaining an orderly, work-focused school environment. Parent influence and support is fundamental to the success of all children.

Our annual Equity and Diversity conference was attended by principal and many teachers. We will use Prairie Middle School in Denver as a model (on many levels) for focusing our resources and efforts on insisting on intentional growth from every student. Equity and access drive every decision and conversation focused in achievement and growth at Bryant.

Technology

Technology is becoming more of a focus with increased research from kindergarten through middle school. There are a variety of resources integral to enhancing efficiency of teaching and learning at school: computer labs, use of document cameras, LCD projector bundles, SMART boards and computers in every classroom, internet research for project-based learning and technology supported student publishing centers. Our PTO's fundraising efforts last year focused on technology, which allowed us to purchase many laptops. Our goal is to put a laptop in the hands of every student whenever needed.

Parent, Family and Community Involvement

- Parent involvement policy and describe how it was distributed.

We invited all parents and families to attend an “Informational Visit” to Bryant later in August before school begins. Montessori strategies, classroom norms, calendar, expectations and commitments to school success, clarification of daily routines (including snack for younger students), ways to become involved as a volunteer, clarity about classroom visitations, and time to discuss with each teacher and principal. I constantly offer opportunities to join me in conversation focused on instruction, Montessori as a program, resources related to curriculum, homework and establishing positive school routines and organization.

Through weekly “Thursday Folders”, Connect-Ed, phone calls home, visuals in hallways, parents are offered opportunities to join with students, staff members and community

members. Our Open House evenings are well attended and are focused on offering strong communication meant to engage everyone.

- Describe how progress is reported to parents

Aside from progress reports, teachers frequently and consistently communicate with parents regarding individualized student progress, or need for closer attention to completion of work at school/home.

- Include ways the school is building capacity for parent involvement

All of the above, along with PTO, “coffee with the principal,” home visits, frequent calls to update parents from principal and teachers.

- Include strategies for family support networking

Clear communication related to expectations and differentiated attention to individual learning needs (social as well as academic) has become one successful strategy to authentically involve families. The current need for much more rigor and focus on working as hard as possible is the focus of many conversations with parents. Involving neighborhood partners (churches, business’, etc.) has increased family support as well.

- Parent Involvement Calendar

PTO – 2nd Tuesday of every month

Open Houses – September, November, March, May, June graduations

Earth and Garden Celebration

Family Fun Nights: four scheduled

Peace Committee Events: Harvest Dance in Fall, December leadership celebration, assemblies throughout year offering leadership opportunities for children which parents attend.

School supplies and back-back offerings are given to students-in-need.

Partnership with Trinity Presbyterian Church: after-school tutoring and close communication with monthly meetings, celebrations and conversations related to serving all youth in our Bryant-Trinity partnership realm.

Non - Title I Schools

- Provide a synopsis of monies used to support your program including Basic Ed, LAP, grants, Trust Funds, etc., and how they are used

LAP support pays a portion of salaries for eight para-educators. Additional para-educator support provides a strong Montessori differentiation opportunities for young children. Offering more time and the option of working with an adult assistant daily in the classroom leads to attaining proficiency in mathematics and literacy.

We have a LAP budget, aside from para support, of \$5800. This will be used solely for parent and community celebrations and events focused on student learning and creativity at school. We strive to bring those who may feel marginalized into these community events. I have met with church leaders, community Hilltop organizers and neighborhood coalitions to bring more community into our Bryant community. I feel that is through Hilltop advocacy from parents as well as neighborhood “friends” that our children will experience greater empowerment and ownership of their school.

I invited the Hilltop Action Coalition to meet at Bryant monthly. These are mainly focused on the safety of the Hilltop neighborhood; however, insights into how our neighbors are responding to a myriad of issues in this area is important for a school principal to know. This is a new partnership for Bryant, which fosters a greater sense of school to neighborhood collaboration and mutual support. I always invite them to our celebrations so that everyone feels welcome at Bryant.

Professional Development Opportunities

- Provisions for staff training in Tacoma include opportunities, incentives and compensation. The district provides a broad spectrum of classes on assessment, standards-based instruction and best practices in the content areas. Staff members receive extra pay to attend these classes and clock hours/university credits are frequently offered. The district also supports and encourages school-based training that support the school’s SIP goals with building-based optional day pay for certificated staff. In addition to classes, instructional facilitators at each Title I school provide ongoing, job embedded staff development. Para educators and other staff receive workshop pay to attend both district and school workshops. Para educators and other staff are encouraged to participate in all Reading and Math curriculum and assessment professional development.
- Parents are informed in the Parent Handbook of their right to know their teachers and para-educators qualifications
- HQ Para-educators meet a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate knowledge and ability in instructing reading, mathematics and writing.
- Tacoma actively recruits highly-qualified staff with our job fair, letters of intent, recommendations to hire and applicant searches. We seek to attract and keep highly-qualified staff at our school by providing opportunities for quality staff development and professional growth.

All teachers in Tacoma are required to meet the NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement. Human Resources sends each school a list of the teachers with their teaching qualifications. THE SCHOOL principal signs an attestation form to confirm

- all staff are highly qualified. In the event that a staff member does not meet the highly qualified requirements, a NCLB HOUSSE Plan of Assistance is developed for the teacher. To support teachers working to achieve highly qualified status, along with all staff striving to provide excellent instruction, our school's professional development/training is focused on best practices in reading and math.

Planning for Transitions

Throughout the middle school years, students visit high school classrooms, attend field trips which offer many opportunities for contribution, responsibility and exploring the 'real' world. Our eighth grade students present and discuss Montessori values and our program frequently.

We offer reading and math workshops for parents. These have been well attended. Strategies for supervising homework, a focus on encouragement rather than praise and learning goals for every grade level have proven to be helpful.

We have "ceremonies" between our levels of learning: From Children's House to Lower Elementary, Lower Elementary to Upper Elementary and Upper Elementary to Middle School. We refer to these as Montessori houses.

Transitional and 'rites of passage' ceremonial celebrations are important to Bryant. Celebrating work, effort, friendships, respect for all community members – these are aspects of every transition. We are fortunate to strive to focus on our shared vision of peace at all times. Peace is core to every aspect of transitioning from one plane of awareness and learning to the next.

Characteristics of High Performing Schools

1. A clear and shared focus.
2. High standards and expectations for all students.
3. Effective school leadership.
4. High levels of collaboration and communication.
5. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards.
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching.
7. Focused professional development.
8. A supportive learning environment.

9. High levels of parent and community involvement.

All of the above characteristics are integral to lesson planning, teacher team discussions, staff meetings and collaborative learning between students as well as staff members. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching is core to classroom visits. The role of observer/learner is a core Montessori value. Students are comfortable with observers quietly observing, not praising, their industrious work. Our professional development is focused on integrating reading and writing. Math: Math Expressions. Bryant offers a 'small school' learning environment which is highly supportive with much parent involvement. Our clear and shared focus in Montessori strategies and "the prepared environment" which fosters a sense of collaborative, independent, challenging classroom learning. Core to the multi-age structure is an insistence on high standards and expectations. These are driven by setting up classroom norms from the first day of school. Principal leadership follows the "Principal as Instructional Leader" value. I use data to motivate conversations and curricular decisions for Bryant focused on student growth. I am proud that our parent and community involvement is growing, due to this being a priority for me when I began my principalship here last year. Changing our enrollment to prioritize neighborhood children has shifted our mission at Bryant from recruiting children throughout Tacoma to attend this school, to honoring the (high) needs of our Hilltop neighborhood children, and welcoming these families into our Bryant community.