

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Middle School Matters & Opportunity Programs

Santa Clara Unified Board of Education

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The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Trustees with an update on the Middle School Matters and Opportunity programs.

Background

Recognizing the need to address the behavioral and academic needs of at-risk youth in our middle schools, the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services met with middle school (MS) principals during Spring 2018 to determine students that would benefit from an intervention class, and an appropriate structure for this class. While the district's Opportunity Program had long existed, district and site administrators recognized the need for providing targeted support to at-risk youth that didn't necessarily need the self-contained structure of the Opportunity Program. Thus, after several meetings, the vision for Middle School Matters (MSM) was born, and development and implementation of the program began.

Purpose of MSM and Opportunity Programs

The purpose of the Opportunity Program has always been to develop students' social-emotional well-being, math skills, and literacy skills and content knowledge in multiple subject areas. Similarly, based on input from multiple stakeholders, there are four main goals of the MSM program. These goals are to develop students':

1. **social-emotional well-being** (SEWB)
2. **literacy skills** through engaging, interdisciplinary content
3. **math skills**, including "basic" and "just-in-time support"
4. **re-engagement** in the local school environment.

Both the MSM and Opportunity Programs fit into the district's Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) for at-risk youth:

Tier 1 Support - Regular Classroom
Tier 2 Support - MSM
Tier 3 Support - Opportunity Program

While students in the Opportunity program may come from all of our district's middle schools and are in a self-contained classroom, students are in MSM classes for two periods per day at Buchser, Cabrillo and Peterson, and three periods per day at Callejon. These configurations were determined by the sites.

Curriculum Development and Training

With the above purposes in mind, the C&I Department began developing curriculum in Summer 2018. The Lead Counselor and Lead Wellness Coordinator identified a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum, and a Math TOSA and Peterson teacher compiled a list of resources to develop students' basic math skills in fun, engaging and challenging ways. We also purchased SEL curriculum from *NewsELA*, a database of high interest, multi-disciplinary short texts that can be differentiated by lexile level. In Summer 2018, all MSM teachers were invited to a paid, one-day institute to learn about the SEL curricula and Math resources. MSM teachers also received a paid training on *NewsELA's* SEL curriculum from publishers.

Since all MSM teachers also teach other subjects, during District Professional Development (PD) days in the Fall they attended subject-specific PD. Like all district teachers, MSM teachers also had the opportunity to select a "choice strand" for the year such as SEL, Restorative Justice, Supporting English Learners, and more. MSM teachers selected the choice strand *Collaborative Unit Planning* to have time to meet and plan together during each district PD day. Either the Director of Secondary Education or a TOSA met with MSM teachers during these PD and other days to facilitate discussions around "strengths, challenges and needs." Following these sessions, the C&I Department developed MSM-specific PD or scheduled dates to provide individualized support to meet MSM teachers' identified needs. For example, during the fall semester, Math, ELA and EdTech TOSAs met with MSM teachers at least two to four times per month. TOSA support included activities such as collaborative lesson design, coaching, providing observations and feedback, and delivering model lessons.

Late in Fall 2018, MSM teachers expressed the need for a curriculum that included daily lesson plans, stating that they found it difficult to find time to develop lesson plans using the existing curricular resources during their prep periods. Our MS ELA TOSA, who had taught a similar student population in Oakland Unified, had developed a curriculum entitled *Be the Change: A Curriculum for Youth Empowerment*. The curriculum aims to increase students' SEWB, literacy, self-empowerment and self-esteem through the below three principles:

- By developing social awareness outside of yourself
- Believe you can make a difference in the world
- You can determine your own future & have agency over your life

The curriculum's SEWB framework is grounded in Maslow's hierarchical needs which recognizes that strong foundations in physiological well-being, safety and security, a sense of love and belonging, and individual self-esteem are necessary for self-actualization. The curriculum consists of about 10 units of study that develop students' SEWB and literacy through current and relevant content, multiple text types (including multimedia) and classroom community building.

The TOSA revised Unit 1 (below) to include updated content and multimedia, and delivered training to both MSM and Opportunity teachers, and the Opportunity para, during a sub-release day on January 7th. This training included an overview of the full course and an in-depth, interactive review of Unit 1, including daily lesson plans. At day's end, teachers selected their choice for Unit 2 (below). The TOSA revised/updated that unit, and provided training on Unit 2 on February 13th. The next unit teachers selected was Unit 3 (below) and they will receive training on Unit 3 later this year.

Unit 1: Empathy - Global Poverty & Refugees

Unit 2: Mindfulness - Criminal Justice

Unit 3: Self-empowerment - Activism

The structure of the units is such that students' develop the SEWB characteristic (e.g., empathy) through study, writing, multimedia and discussion (literacy) about the engaging content (e.g., global poverty). The units are so impactful that the Callejon MSM teacher used Unit 1 with her AVID students. In addition, some MSM/Opportunity teachers developed supplemental lessons which they stored in a common Google folder during the February 13th PD.

In MSM and Opportunity classes, students also develop SEWB through weekly "circles" facilitated by each site's wellness coordinator. For the MSM programs, these circles are grounded in a Restorative Justice framework. For the Opportunity program, circles are grounded in a therapeutic model.

As mentioned previously, teachers received plentiful resources to support students' basic skill development in mathematics, along with weekly and/or "as requested" TOSA support. Until early February, none of the MSM teachers had a mathematics background and expressed the need for para support given that MSM classes are composed of both 7th and 8th graders. While we were able to ensure that all MSM students had the same "regular" math teacher, thereby making "just in time" support easier on MSM teachers, all MSM teachers increasingly felt the need for a para to support either 7th or 8th graders while the teacher was supporting the other group of students.

Given the lack of mathematics background among MSM teachers, the C&I Department continually sought to strengthen curricular and pedagogical support in mathematics for MSM teachers. An EdTech TOSA recognized that K-5 students were thriving with their new intervention program, *Dreambox*, and suggested that MSM teachers pilot *Dreambox* to support math development of their students. Not only would the Common Core aligned *Dreambox* provide continuity in terms of a curricular platform, it was able to address both of our Math goals in a single program: 1) to develop students' basic skills in mathematics, and 2) to provide "just in time" support with current learning in students' "regular" math classes. Moreover, *Dreambox* is computer adaptive; that is, the program "adjusts" to what students currently know, and what they need to learn, whether in basic skill development or on work in their "regular" math classes, which can be uploaded into the system. Two EdTech TOSAs provided several trainings on *Dreambox* since January 2019, and both Math and EdTech TOSAs have

continued to provide individualized support to MSM and Opportunity teachers with *Dreambox*.

Student Progress

The below tables contain notes from discussions during the January 7 and February 13 PDs. Table 1 depicts *Student Triumphs* and Table 2 depicts *Student Challenges* that teachers shared during collaborative reflections. It should be noted that this Executive Summary was prepared on February 13th, the evening following February 13th MSM/Opportunity PD. The tables below are a little less complete for Peterson MSM because the Semester 1 teacher was recently replaced by two new teachers. The tables are also less complete for the Opportunity program because the teacher has been out due to a family emergency, and the para did not have access to student grades.

Student Triumphs

As depicted in the tables below, student triumphs in the MSM and Opportunity programs pertain to improvements in grades, mathematics, self-regulation, study habits, emotional maturity, self-advocacy, student-teacher and student-student relationships, and responsibility for self and classroom community

January 7, 2019	February 13, 2019
MSM-Buchser <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underperforming student wanted to do a (homeless) project she'd heard was happening in another MSM class • Student wants to "teach" other students • Circles - want to do w/teacher (not just wellness coordinator) 	MSM-Buchser <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student told the sub to tell the teacher that she's participating while the teacher is gone! • Our men's group • No F's - all C's, B's & A's • A student is motivated by trying to earn his dad's trust back. He is caught up on ELA work, but upset with PE teacher. He will work on advocating for himself with PE teacher. He used to talk inappropriately and now doesn't unless another student does. He also advocated for himself with his art teacher. RJ is really successful for this student. Next step - "harm circle" with PE teacher. • Two boys who usually talk inappropriately have calmed down and have begun to show interest in academics, and have begun to ask for help
MSM-Cabrillo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids have formed a community & are protective of one another • Circles • Grades are up 	MSM-Cabrillo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student will be transitioning out of MSM because he has strengthened maturity by taking ownership of behaviors, self-regulating, self-monitoring, etc. He now loves math, celebrates his grades in class, has strengthened his study habits, and is doing more school work by himself/needs teacher less. This student was

	<p>initially placed in MSM for such behaviors as constant talking, getting up in class and walking around, not paying attention, excessive excuses, negative attention seeking. The opening class ritual of just two tasks - getting tracker reading and joining circle - has really helped this student.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in Math - students are turning in more math assignments • With one exception, nothing lower than a C this quarter
<p>MSM-Callejon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 students want to go back to regular Ed for 1 period • An AVID student requested MSM • Student w/prior anxiety over holidays did not miss one day - and she's beginning to laugh! She also has straight A's. 	<p>MSM-Callejon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some kids helped me w/a difficult conversation, specifically to get kid on point with another student on topics of trust/respect • Kids taking ownership of culture & classroom • School not enemy - their safe place, kids look forward to being in MSM • Students have a group chat about school even though they don't hang out together • One student has 4 Ds and 2 Cs right now - no F's, which is a win for him - and he's, paying attention to grades. Before he had substantial self-loathing, diabetic, a lot of emotional trauma, and wasn't attending to health needs. Now, he's bringing his glucose monitor to school and increasing responsibility to take care of his health. He's advocating for himself now, and even reminds teacher to stay hydrate! He's taking care of his basic needs now. He used to go to bathroom to hide out, and now he's checking his blood sugar. Not quite where he should be, but much improved. • Kids are understanding each other's SEWB. The above guy broke down in group one day and shared that he is scared that due to his size and strength he'll hurt someone if he becomes upset, which is why he hides out sometimes. • SEWB - students are taking the time to talk and work through problems together. • John Malloy - group counselor - is awesome and seems to reach every student • Improvement in Math - more resilience • Four of my students have made Honor roll - one had bad anxiety • This is a safe place and they need this safe safe space to discuss their concerns (one student actually strove to get an F in Q2 because she was afraid that with good grades she would be removed from the MSM class)
<p>MSM-Peterson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids trust teacher, 	<p>MSM-Peterson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I started teaching this class about a week ago,

<p>confide in him, seek his advice</p>	<p>and kids had had subs for a while and there were no lesson plans left by the previous teacher, kids were helping each other, explained what they had been doing, took the initiative to help each other, and encouraged each other when fellow students were being hard on themselves. There was a positive community amongst the kids.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are afraid of math and this class is important because they do not feel pressure. A few students have become more comfortable "being wrong" when sharing answers - and that's just what I'd like them to do! • No Fs, a few Ds (but zero missing assignments), some Bs, Cs, Ds, As • 1 student has mostly A's except for PE
<p>Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students come together as a community, caring for each other • Teen Talk - Sex Ed • Community welcomed with open arms a student who had been in Rehab 	<p>Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub reported that students are doing fine, so the culture and norms are well-established • Our student who is the hardest core kid has a difficult background. Both his father and uncle got murdered and he found out who the killers were while searching online during class. This child has significant abandonment and trust issues. He is also very bright, but would not "show his work" (e.g., in answering math problems). His behavior has improved and he is not showing his answers. This started with scaffolds - having him "shoot for a C" and just show work for 70% of the problems. Now, he shows work for all math problems. He talks straight and listens. He is very noise-sensitive and needs to move around. His awareness of others is increasing and he is trusting us (teacher and para) now. He has a 504, but is no longer disrupting class.

Student Challenges

As depicted in the tables below, continued needs for students in the MSM and Opportunity programs include substance abuse support and grade improvement. In addition, there remains a need to improve communication among all staff about each MSM student, and a need for all teachers to ensure that they are addressing students' IEPs & 504s.

January 7, 2019	February 13, 2019
<p>MSM-Buchser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student refused services of counseling intern 	<p>MSM-Buchser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student may need therapy or testing, especially testing for SpEd

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student stopped doing academic work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always getting emails answered from school personnel • Some behavioral problems including shouting / volume • Several kids w/multiple F's and/or grades going down (all subjects)
MSM-Cabrillo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming/integrating a new student into our community • Substance abuse support - a replacement for kids who are reducing use of drugs • Need a protocol for students getting referrals 	MSM-Cabrillo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still have a significant # of Fs & Ds, esp. among students new to school • Need anti-drug support • Problems with organization & sustained periods of being able to work (even 5 mins) • Need info on going to Opportunity
MSM-Callejon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids get clear, close support from we MSM teachers, but not necessarily from "regular" teachers • Students need help understanding what "regular" teachers expect of them • Needs of students are not being communicated to other teachers & support staff 	MSM-Callejon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more 1:1 time for academic support - need a paraeducator to help with strategic teaching - a lot of kids have IEPs and some 504s • Three students - all 7th graders - have F's in Math
MSM-Peterson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student is failing & making no progress; wonder if SpEd 	MSM-Peterson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students do not know why they are in MSM - there needs to be intake/out-take. I did not know how to explain why they were in this class. This class needs highly qualified teachers who are invested in understanding the whole child and meeting needs of students with IEPs and 504s - (regular) teachers aren't necessarily meeting those needs... • Need to improve communication among all staff
Opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed mindset • Lack of resilience • Substance abuse support 	Opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Next Steps

- Address challenges summarized above
- Develop materials that describe MSM and Opportunity programs for students, families, school staff, and public
- Create a clear plan for transitioning into and out of MSM and Opportunity, including a “soft landing spot” for students’ next placement (e.g., Community Day students should be placed in Opportunity or MSM before full placement in regular classrooms)
- Explore possibility of getting a paraprofessional for MSM classes
- Develop a system to track longitudinal progress of MSM and Opportunity students