

Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
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McCarthy-Towne School
School Improvement Plan for
2018-2019 School Year

School Improvement Plan

School Council Membership

Name	Role	Year of Term
David Krane	Principal (Chair)	Permanent
Marni Zelnick	Parent	2017-2019
Joe Biedenkapp	Parent	2017-2019
Jessica Lubets	Parent	2016-2018
Kerry Lewis	Parent (Co-Chair)	2015-2017
Kari James	Faculty	2016-2018
Bethany Ahern	Faculty	2017-2019
Nancy Kolb	Community Representative	(Appointed)

First Goal: Continue to develop and support the workshop model in all classrooms:

- A. Participate in professional learning activities to improve teaching and learning to support the Common Core curriculum
- B. Continue to inform families about the Workshop Model

Background and Rationale:

McCarthy-Towne School will be entering the fifth year of a professional learning relationship with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) at Columbia University. For the sixth year in a row, we will be sending a group of teachers to the Teachers College Summer Institutes. These weeklong Institutes add to teacher knowledge and skill base around the Reading and Writing Workshop model. Project Staff Developers visit us across the school year to work with teachers to synthesize work done during the school year with the summer work. Six teachers will be attending Writers Workshop Institutes this summer as our school shifts specific focus to the teaching and learning through the Writers Workshop.

For the coming academic year, we will continue to emphasize writing instruction in the content areas, as well as work on small group work and increased use of Guided Reading in the primary classrooms. To that end, we will be using the services of a consultant previously connected with the Reading and Writing Project. This consultant will provide specific supports for classroom teachers

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throughout the coming school year around small group instruction and will visit McCarthy-Towne over the course of the year to coach into this work.

We will also continue to use the Workshop model for mathematics instruction. In mathematics, we will design instruction to blend the content standards and the practice standards. This effort is teacher-driven, using a variety of existing Math Workshop ideas and concepts, and fitting them within the structural framework of the Reader's and Writer's Workshop models as outlined by Teachers College. Familiarity and experience with this structure will allow educators and students to more easily transition into the instruction.

We will plan on using some of the Thursday afternoon Professional Learning time, reading Jo Boaler's *Mathematical Mindsets*, with assigned reading, conversation, and hands-on activities.

This revised goal aligns with the ABRSD Strategic Plan Values around Equity and Engagement.

Strategies:

ELA

- a. Continue to participate as a Project School
- b. Continue to send faculty to Teachers College at Columbia University for on-going training at the Reading and Writing Project
- c. Continue to integrate content instruction during Workshop time, with specific attention to writing in the Science and Social Studies components
- d. Adjust classroom and school-wide schedules to support instructional change
- e. Engaging an expert consultant to work with a specific area of instruction during the Readers Workshop and to coach classroom teachers: small group work and Guided Reading

MATH

- a. Continue to explore the use of assistants to support classroom math instruction
- b. Adjust classroom and school-wide schedules to support instructional change
- c. Continue to evaluate the Math Workshop in the Primary Grades

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Outcomes:

Teachers will continue to explore and use new methodology to adjust instruction, examine and integrate Common Core standards, effectively integrate new lessons into the curriculum, and refine lessons to address identified needs.

Second Goal: To enhance social vocabulary and interactions for all children by continuing to use Responsive Classroom for the school community and by continuing to implement ideas and methodology from the Social Thinking curriculum.

We will take a pro-active, educational approach to creating a positive social environment that fosters respect and compassion for all. We will set school community-wide expectations and norms including both adults and children.

Background and Rationale:

Responsive Classroom and Social Thinking are specific research-based curricula that address social interactions that give students strategies to be contributing members of classroom and school communities. We will tie in the Social Thinking and the Responsive Classroom platforms with district-wide goals of building social/emotional health for all students and faculty in the ABRSD.

This self-awareness enables students to connect to the academic realm, including critical thinking, reading comprehension, social problem solving, written expression, and perspective taking.

This is an ongoing goal for our school community. For the coming school year, the School Counselor will expand the range of classrooms for specific whole class instruction around the concepts of Social Thinking, including the use of specific language, vocabulary, and descriptors to develop skills around social problem solving.

This revised goal aligns with the ABRSD Strategic Plan Values around Wellness, Equity, and Engagement.

Strategies:

- a. Schedule parent information forums that specifically address the mechanics and philosophy of Responsive Classroom

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- b. Offer teacher-led workshops on specific Responsive Classroom teachings for select groups of staff members, including classroom assistants, on topics such as *Thorny Behaviors* and *Responding to Misbehavior*
- c. Use the language and strategies of Social Thinking in conjunction with the structures of Responsive Classroom
- d. Plan to offer Professional Learning that would blend the ideas and concepts of both Social Thinking and Responsive Classroom

Outcomes:

Increase student and adult self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These factors all contribute to stronger community building for educators, students and families.

Third Goal: Continue to explore and implement methods of integrating visual art into the curriculum at McCarthy-Towne, deepening curriculum understanding and enhancing the social emotional well being of students. To this end, it is important to educate the McCarthy-Towne families and community about the value of Art Integration in the classroom, and to ensure that all faculty understand the importance of art integration and know how to best incorporate art into both the academic units of study and the social/emotional work of the classroom.

Background and Rationale:

Since the early days of McCarthy-Towne, Art Integration has been an important part of who we are as a school. Integrating art with content material has many benefits, including new learning, deeper understanding of concepts and materials, and internalization of the subject matter. Additionally, the experiential process encourages exploration, risk-taking, problem solving, and flexibility, while promoting positive self-image and the ability to express oneself. We believe that all learning needs to be grounded in experiential process, and that the more traditional focus on the product or outcome deprives students of an awareness of how learning can apply to their lives. Making visual art is an example of experiential learning. Additionally, reflecting and speaking about the art not only strengthens students' understanding of the content, but also of themselves as learners. Through art, students also learn to appreciate and value each other as members of a larger community.

This revised goal aligns with the ABRSD Strategic Plan Values around Wellness, Equity, and Engagement.

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Strategies:

- a. Designate time for teachers to collaborate and plan with the Art Integration specialist, school counselor, school psychologist, and administrators
- b. Provide school-wide and team-based professional learning opportunities for staff, which may include observing projects in process at various grade levels
- c. Organize presentations to the community on the use of art in the social and emotional curriculum and in the academic curriculum

Outcomes:

More deeply incorporating art integration will strengthen students' resiliency, self-confidence, expression, and academic risk-taking. Art integration will also promote student learning of subject materials, and teacher understanding of student strengths and challenges.

Fourth Goal:

To educate and inform the McCarthy-Towne families, as well as all of the recently hired faculty members, in the three cornerstones of classroom activities which support the mission and vision of the McCarthy-Towne School:

- The Workshop model in literacy, mathematics, and content area instruction
- The Responsive Classroom and Social Thinking tenets, concepts, and curriculum as a way of consistently maintaining the language of social problem solving
- Art Integration as a way of strengthening student engagement, investment in their learning, and commitment to perseverance, risk-taking, and the responsibilities of being a member of a community

Background and Rationale:

The demographics of the ABRSD and of McCarthy-Towne are changing. Acton and Boxborough are becoming places of greater diversity, racially, ethnically, and economically, and so are the schools, including McCarthy-Towne. Our families are now of a different generation and many are unaware of the history of Open

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Enrollment and the autonomy that this concept allows each of the ABRSD elementary schools to experience and enjoy. Open Enrollment, or school choice, encourages families to look closely at each elementary school and then choose a school that most closely meets the educational aspirations of the family. As a result, families, more often than not, become a part of a school community that they have selected. This initial “automatic engagement” thus has families and students welcomed into a school community that is closest to their value system. This is what separates ABRSD from other towns and cities in the Commonwealth: parents are not assigned a neighborhood school; rather, they are assigning themselves a school, a school which hews closest to how they believe their children should be educated.

At McCarthy-Towne, the design and structure of strong instruction necessarily includes a strong social curriculum as well as a strong academic emphasis. We believe that Art Integration, Responsive Classroom and Social Thinking, and the Workshop model for reading and writing and mathematics are integral parts of our identity as a school. These three elements also are a significant part of why families are attracted to our school.

Strategies:

Workshop Model

1. Continue to participate as a Project School
2. Continue to send faculty to Teachers College at Columbia University for on-going training at the Reading and Writing Project
3. Continue to integrate content instruction during Workshop time
4. Adjust classroom and school-wide schedules to support instructional change
5. Schedule a Parent Education Evening to allow parents to explore Art Integration in a deeper way

Art Integration

1. Make available to new incoming staff members strategy and history sessions about the why and how of Art Integration
2. Provide time for classroom visits for staff for the exchange of ideas, thinking, and techniques
3. Schedule a Parent Education Evening to allow parents to explore Art Integration in a deeper way
4. Expand the display of student work throughout the school

Responsive Classroom and Social Thinking

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1. Expand the role of the School Counselor in direct instruction of the language and vocabulary of Social Thinking
2. Develop specific workshop content for faculty using Responsive Classroom instructional kits
3. Continue to emphasize community expectations around the use of Responsive Classroom and the language of Social Thinking
4. Schedule a Parent Education Evening to allow parents to explore Responsive Classroom and Social Thinking in a deeper way

Outcomes: The McCarthy-Towne community will develop forums, publications, and other means of educating our families about the history, mission, and vision of our school. Understanding that Art Integration is a central part of that vision and history will be a critical component of that educational effort.

Assessment of Previous Year's School Improvement Plan

First Goal: Continue to develop and support the workshop model in all classrooms:

- i. Participate in professional learning activities in order to improve teaching and learning to support the Common Core curriculum
- ii. Continue to inform families about the function and meaning of the Workshop Model

Goal Assessment:

This will always be an on-going goal for the McCarthy-Towne teaching community. We continue to grow as adult learners even as we continue to gain a new cohort of teachers. This growth translates directly into stronger literacy instruction, which is foundational in the study of science and social studies. Although we are finding Math Workshop to be a challenge to implement as

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effectively as the literacy workshop models, we continue to explore, experiment, and become more educated about how to best deploy this system. Workshop is inherently differentiated and the structure allows for students to work at many different instructional levels. We are continuing to study how to improve mathematics instruction using the workshop model.

Second Goal: Responsive Classroom for the entire school community

We will take a pro-active, educational approach to creating a positive social environment that fosters respect and compassion for all. We will set school community-wide expectations and norms that include both adults and children.

Goal Assessment:

Morning Meeting, a central tenet of the Responsive Classroom, has become an integral part of the fabric of our school. Each morning at 8:25, one can hear the simultaneous sound of the chime, calling children to the Meeting Area throughout the school.

Responsive Classroom, now linked with the explicit classroom instruction of Social Thinking, has had a visible affect on our school culture over the past few years. As this has become regular practice in the classroom, children are bringing their knowledge and understanding of Responsive Classroom philosophy as ascend through the grades. For many of our students, Responsive Classroom and, now, the language and meaning of Social Thinking, have become a part of school expectations. We will be gaining four new educators for the coming academic year and all of them will be given the opportunity to attend a weeklong workshop and training in Responsive Classroom philosophy and strategies.

Third Goal: Continue to explore and implement methods of integrating visual art into the curriculum at McCarthy-Towne, deepening curriculum understanding and enhancing the social emotional well being of students. To this end, it is important to educate the McCarthy-Towne families and community about the value of Art Integration in the classroom, and to ensure that all faculty understand the importance of art integration and know how to best incorporate art into both the academic units of study and the social/emotional work of the classroom.

Our school teaching community was very successful in making progress in this goal. A committee of teachers organized six Thursday afternoon workshops with

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a goal of familiarizing all of the certified staff with the history, the application, and the purpose of Art Integration in the classroom. Kari James, a Second Grade teacher and a member of the School Council, led this effort in large part.

Although a faculty committee developed the scope and sequence and planned the six workshops, all faculty members, including the Music, Physical Education teacher, as well as our Library Media Assistant, enthusiastically supported this work. Heidi Kupferman, our Visual Arts teacher, was also a leader in the preparation of the workshop, as were Fifth Grade teacher Jen Pratt, Second Grade teacher Heather Matthews, and First Grade teacher Heather Wilson. Faculty who has joined McCarthy-Towne in the past few years viewed this work as particularly important, and, as we add more staff members in the coming academic year, we will revisit some of this work for them, albeit in a truncated way.

It was with great pride that we presented to School Committee a slide show this past April illustrating some of the more important features of Art Integration and the impact upon students.

We would like to acknowledge the value of the Thursday afternoon Professional Learning time made available to the school. That time to work on many things important to our school was very valuable.