Tri-State Consortium

Mount Pleasant Central School District

TRI-STATE CONSULTANCY 2024

Authentic Assessment, Grading, & Reporting Practices

April 10 - 12, 2024

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Executive Summary

The Tri-State Consortium, a professional network of **sixty** public school districts in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, advances student performance through a continuous improvement process. Based on a framework of eight quality indicators, the process involves a self-study by member districts and a triennial cycle of review by teams of fellow educators whose districts also belong to the Consortium. Serving as critical friends, these teams provide Tri-State districts with external feedback about current strengths and promising next steps.

The Tri-State team spent three days on April 10, April 11, and April 12, 2024, in the district. The team, which consisted of fifteen teachers, administrators, and Tri-State staff members, was welcomed by Dr. Peter Giarrizzo, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Adam Bronstein, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Administrative Services, and members of their Tri-State steering committee. Throughout the visit, the Consortium team examined evidence, visited classrooms, and interviewed students, parents, teachers, administrators, and members of the Board of Education.

The Mount Pleasant Central School District (Mount Pleasant) has approximately 2000 students who reside in the towns of Hawthorne, Thornwood, Valhalla, and Pleasantville. It is organized according to the Princeton Plan and has four schools: Hawthorne Elementary (HES) serving children in kindergarten through second grade, Columbus Elementary (CES) a third through fifth grade building, Westlake Middle School (WMS) serving students in grades sixth through eighth, and Westlake High School (WHS) for ninth through twelfth graders. WMS and WHS share a campus.

At the opening meeting school leaders shared the scope of their work which has seen the creation of the district's new strategic plan, the Portrait of a Mount Pleasant Learner (POL), and the beginning of the development of POL skills progressions that will outline the continuum of learning for each of its qualities. Five progressions have been completed. The impetus for this work was to unify instructional approaches being used across the schools, and to ensure that explicit connections could be made between Mount Pleasant's mission and organizational values. This work was intentionally constructed to manifest benefits both in the immediate and the long-term. It was created by leveraging the diversity of experience and thought among stakeholder groups. The language used across the documents, particularly in the POL, was chosen to communicate that in Mount Pleasant **everyone** is a learner. It is the responsibility of all community members to the model behaviors necessary to bring these critical ideas and qualities to life.

The strategic plan is designed to support competency-based learning, using performance-based learning (PBL) as an instructional model to meet its objectives. PBL allows for students to demonstrate what they know, understand, and are able to do. It provides the dynamic, flexible, and authentic contexts necessary to realize the district's goals.

Essential Questions and Indicators

Mount Pleasant is now at a point in their journey where they are considering how performance-based learning tasks can assess student progress across the core competencies and the qualities of the POL. To support the district in measuring growth, and in gathering the data and evidence to consider next steps, Mount Pleasant has asked the Consortium team to consider the following essential questions.

- **Essential Question #1**
  To what extent do our assessments provide for authentic, inquiry, and performance-based tasks that gauge student growth and progress towards the competencies and the Portrait of a Learner?

- **Essential Question #2**
  To what extent is our system prepared to grade, report, and provide feedback on student performance and progress towards the competencies and the Portrait of a Learner?

Critical friends feedback will be provided through the lenses of the following Tri-State Indicators:

- Indicator #1: Performance-Based Assessment
  Educators utilize performance-based assessments that capture the extent to which students are able to transfer, apply, and construct knowledge. These assessments enable students to demonstrate their ability to integrate knowledge, skills, dispositions, and higher-level thinking within and across disciplines. Performance-based assessments typically are student-driven, long-term, research-based, and interdisciplinary. Student work is assessed against a set of common criteria, and results are used to gauge student understanding of complex concepts and, over time, to inform curriculum and instruction

- Indicator #2: Student Metacognition
  Educators design and provide a learning environment that asks students to reflect not just on what they have learned, but also on how they have learned. The district encourages and enables students to engage in metacognition continuously and systemically. Students build the capacity over time to assess, reflect upon, and make choices that advance their own learning.

- Indicator #7 Shared Vision and Environment for Change
  Shared vision and goals focused on student performance have been developed with the staff and community, are well articulated, clearly communicated, consistently pursued throughout the district and school community, and include student voice. This vision expects, supports, and recognizes risk-taking, creativity, and innovation as components of change toward continuous improvement. There is a process to review student and teacher work and learn from experimentation.

- Indicator #8: Parent and Community Support
  The district actively involves parents and community constituent groups in ongoing two-way communication to advance student learning. A wide range of community resources extends the classroom and enriches the educational experience of students. The budget development process supports the mission, vision, and goals of the district, is aligned with efforts to advance student learning, and is supported by the community.

The district provided the Essential Questions, indicators, and preparatory material in advance of our visit. The Essential Questions provided the schema for the team's study. These questions are answered separately and inclusively and serve as the format for the Annenberg Consultancy protocol that was facilitated on the third day of the visit. The responses to these questions are in the next section of this report, and they are meant to assist Mount Pleasant as it continues to write its evolving story.

Response to Essential Questions

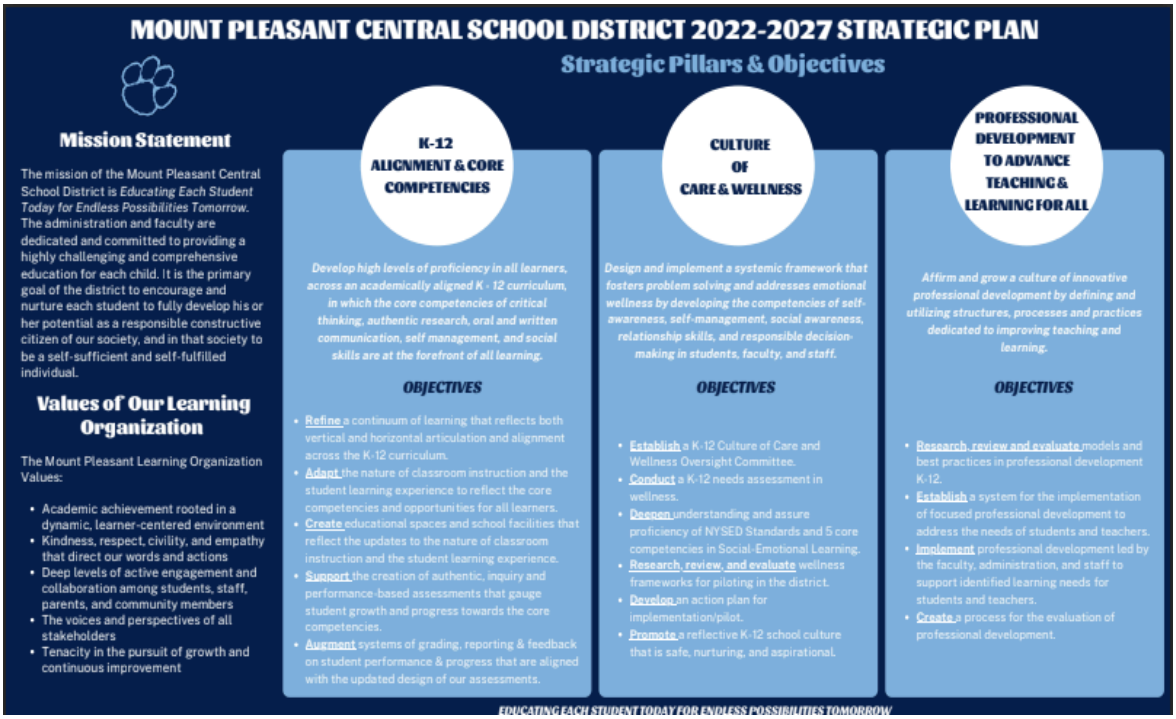
Essential Question #1

To what extent do our assessments provide for authentic, inquiry, and performance-based tasks that gauge student growth and progress towards the competencies and the Portrait of a Learner?

In crafting an answer to this Essential Question, the district has asked the Consortium team to consider the following wonderings:

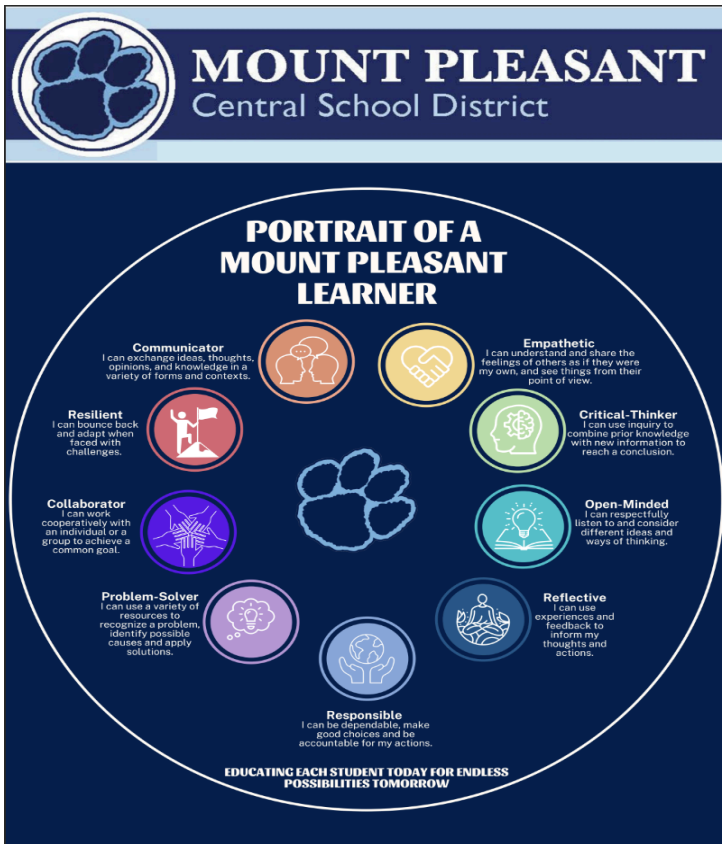
- Do our tasks provide for genuine, real-world application?
- Are students provided the opportunity to engage in questioning and higher-order thinking?
- Can students transfer and integrate skills, competencies, and qualities within and across disciplines?

The strategic plan and the Portrait of a Mount Pleasant Learner are the foundational documents that provide the context to consider these queries. They drive all considerations around teaching and learning. The strategic plan was developed first. It is important to note that although it has three pillars, the first, *K-12 Alignment and Core Competencies,* will be the focus of this visit.



The objectives reflect the district's mission and are deeply rooted in its values. They serve to make them actionable. The competencies detail, as stated by Dr. Giarrizzo, "how the academic heavy lifting is done in classrooms." They are intended to give students the tools they need to access the skills detailed in the POL.

The POL has nine qualities that represent important dispositions that all students need to be successful in the real world. These include:



How and when the qualities are taught are intended to be tied to the instructional context or learning experiences that most authentically reflect its purpose. There is intentional overlap between the strategic plan pillars and the Portrait of a Learner. Each pillar has a connection with one (or several) of its qualities. The documents are intended to provide the skills and dispositions to inform the creation and assessment of performance-based tasks.

Across the district, some learning is placed in authentic contexts and provided real-world applications. Particularly noteworthy is the work being done in the Career Research Academy at WHS. Students there spoke enthusiastically about the impact that the program has made on their lives and their vision of school. One noted that, “I never liked school until I got here. I was always the kid that got into trouble. I wasn’t being taught anything that I was interested in. When I got here, and I could learn and do what I felt was important, it was great. I am really happy to be here.” The WMS Egg Crash Design Challenge in seventh-grade science replicated the process used in automobile crash tests. It prompted students to work collaboratively to create a safety mechanism prototype that would securely deliver a crash test dummy (an egg)

down a ramp. At CES, students in STEAM considered real-world solutions to generate green energy by designing and constructing working models of wind turbines. Learners at HES applied their knowledge of shapes to design a playground. And, special educators across the district are enthusiastically crafting learning experiences that have real-world applications. One special educator noted, "This is all that I do. It is so important for my students to be able to connect their school work to their lives. It gives them purpose. They get excited and engaged when they can see how what they have learned can be used in their life."

There are projects in each school that have elements of performance-based learning. As noted above, the use of authentic contexts were central to the majority of them. There were some that were performative, where students demonstrated their understandings and summarized their learnings through either the creation of a product or through reading, writing, or recitation. The challenge that surfaced in the examination of evidence and in conversations with stakeholders is the need to support teachers in better understanding the goals, the structures, and the strategies of performance-based learning. Professional learning, it was stated, would play a central role in addressing this. The district has provided opportunities for faculty to, "dip their toe in the water," to adapt to this change, recognizing that a shift from, "teachers having things done **to** them instead of **with** them," was culturally important. Acknowledging this has yielded a tremendous amount of buy-in. However, many teachers the Consortium team spoke to addressed the need for increased systemic and individualized opportunities to learn more about designing and assessing performance-based learning. In addition, staff also wanted to immerse themselves in the POL. One elementary teacher shared, "I really believe this work is important, but I am not sure how it gets done. I need to find words I can use that the kids will understand. I also am not sure how to assess what they have learned. I think that expectations are going to be different depending on the age of the child." The view of the faculty is that implementation will be positively impacted when teachers feel well-grounded in the "how" of their work.

Metacognition differs from reflection in that it asks learners to engage cognitive processes to assess their thinking. Reflection prompts children to consider concrete experiences, actions, and outcomes. While both are essential components of self-assessment, it is through metacognitive thought that transfer and skill integration are more likely to take place. Most teachers have integrated reflection into their assessments. There were examples in every school that showed children considering their content learning. In the fifth grade Earth Spheres Diorama reflection, students rated their collaboration efforts. The Math 8 test reflection asks children to consider how well prepared they were for the examination. At HES, there is a math reflection that asks

young learners to consider how well they understood a particular concept. The ninth-grade Reading Ladder reflection prompted students to assess reading skills and book choice.

The shift to metacognitive self-assessment was more pronounced at the secondary level. In the seventh grade, the mathematics course selection rubric is well-integrated with the POL qualities and asks students to provide evidence for their ratings. The WHS Winter Concert reflection has children considering how they sang and how they self-managed performance behaviors. It also had them assess their overall preparedness for the concert. Elementary teachers expressed the challenges they face asking students to deeply consider their learning. This is particularly true of Hawthorne faculty who work hard to assess in language that, as one teacher noted, "little kids can understand. Our children are still very interested in themselves and their own world. They are not ready to think about themselves abstractly. It would be great to have some support in thinking more about this." At CES, there are end-of-unit writing assessments that ask students to identify their challenges, their new learning, and to consider how this impacts their future writing. A teacher shared, "it took us time to get there and we had to do a lot of teaching into the rubric. But, the kids can do it." Elementary teachers noted that it would be helpful to understand the expectations for the development of metacognition. They would like a continuum of learning that would scaffold the ability of students to engage in higher-order thinking across the grades.

The extent to which the Consortium team saw evidence of transfer and integration across disciplines was likely impacted by where the district is in the change process. Mount Pleasant has formulated an approach to this work that has established a strong foundation for their implementation efforts. The faculty has been given what they need to begin to integrate the POL and the core competencies into their teaching. As structures are developed to reflect the components of performance-based learning, as teachers engage in the professional learning necessary to feel confident in their efforts, and as the POL progressions are completed, the tools and resources will be in place that will allow for the development of higher order, transdisciplinary learning experiences to be created. It is important to consider how all students will have access to this work. When interviewing teachers and visiting classrooms the Consortium team noted differences in expectations based on a student's learning level. There may be misconceptions that students who are more successful in school and who take higher-level courses are more able and ready to engage in questioning and to transfer their learning to new contexts. However, there were examples at the elementary schools and in special education classes where children were making strong connections between, for example, POL qualities and their lived experiences.

The majority of secondary students interviewed were high achieving and were in honors and advanced placement classes. Those in high school saw a pronounced shift in their instruction beginning in the tenth grade. They feel like they are being asked more often to apply their learning. There are fewer multiple-choice quizzes and tests. They are enthusiastic about working on projects. They believe that they are expected to be more independent and are given many opportunities to collaborate. They felt that, for example, the Socratic Seminar taught them the skills they needed to self-manage their conversations and engage in higher-order discussions. One student shared, " I love the Socratic Seminar. We are expected to be in control. I also feel like I'm getting a lot more personal feedback in my other subjects. I don't have to wait around to get a quiz or a test back to know how I am doing." Ninth-grade students described a different experience. Although there are more projects, they feel like, as one student shared "school is still pretty much the same. We get tests and quizzes. We have a lot of lectures. There is less performance. This is hard on kids who are not great test takers. If they could show what they know, you might see that they have learned a lot." All of the children knew about the POL having learned about it in the middle school Foundation and University courses.

Mount Pleasant families are very supportive of the work being done in the district. While they have an overall sense of the strategic plan and the POL, the parents who were interviewed said that they would like much more information about how it impacts teaching and learning. They learned of the POL at Board of Education meetings, "But, " one parent said, "If you weren't there, you wouldn't know about it. We need consistent information from the school and we would love to know more about what our children are doing in their classes." Another parent shared, "My kids talk about their projects and they are really excited about them. I think that what they are being asked to do in class is much more creative. My son brought home a rubric which was nice to see. But I don't see much self-reflection. And it would be great if rubrics would be sent home more often so I could help him at home." They would also like to have time at conferences to discuss skills. Several CES parents wanted to know more about how their children learned. Elementary families would like to see smaller classroom-based celebrations of learning. They noted that before the pandemic, there were many opportunities to visit classrooms. A parent said, "We all miss that. With all these changes that I believe in, it would be great to see them in action." It is important to note from the perspective of the schools, there has been a great deal of communication happening. One administrator stated, "It would be helpful to try to understand the disconnect. We feel we are always communicating, but we are aware that the community may think it is not enough."

In order to assist the district in their efforts to implement performance-based learning and to use this context to gauge student growth towards the competencies and the Portrait of the Learner, the Consortium offers the following commendations and recommendations:

Commendations

- The district has created comprehensive documents that are foundational to the design of performance-based tasks. It is developing progressions that outline the continuum of learning for each of the POL qualities. These tools will serve to provide important information on the cultural and instructional shifts inherent in the strategic plan. They also speak to the value that Mount Pleasant places on learning that is engaging, active, authentic, and meaningful.
- The Consortium team saw a wide variety of rubrics in use across the schools. This form of assessment allows for expectations, criteria, and standards to be explicitly stated. It minimizes ambiguity and enables students to focus their efforts on important learning. Rubrics enrich feedback, providing specific information about strengths and areas of growth. The flexibility that their structure brings allows for the measurement of performance tasks against lesson goals and objectives and for the development of skills aligned with the POL.
- Work has been done to align reporting structures to the POL and the core competencies. The elementary schools have created a standards-based report card that provides families with feedback on five of the nine POL qualities. WMS and WHS have begun conversations on aligning their comments to the language of the core competencies and the POL. These initial steps are important to the enculturation of the work across the community.
- Special educators and related service providers are strong supporters of authentic learning. As noted in the narrative above, they believe that their students excel when they can make meaningful connections to their work. The WHS Mid Year Reflection taken by English language learners enables faculty to gather meaningful data on their progress and well-being. This tool might be used as an exemplar of measuring metacognitive thought.
- Each Building Leadership Team is actively working to incorporate POL qualities and core competencies in their meeting structures and in their planning. This works to support the district's shared vision and models to the faculty processes that can support their planning and collaborations.
- Faculty meetings, teacher institutes, and Superintendent's Conference Days are used to provide professional learning to teachers on performance-based learning. Having

structures in place that enable large groups of faculty to work together allows for common understandings to be developed.

- There are strong examples of metacognitive thinking across the district. The exit slip and rubric reflections in use in many music classes at WMS ask students to reflect on the POL qualities and their learning and prompts them to consider how to use feedback to change their performance. The eighth-grade social studies claim paragraph reflection asks children to create a plan to improve their work and to identify the feedback that would be helpful in doing so. The K-12 STEAM Planning Tool asks students to consider their learning strengths and challenges. The Fractured Fairy Tale project provides multiple opportunities for second and fifth-graders to reflect on writing. It has mid and final reflections that allow for learning to be considered throughout the process. And it includes a chalk talk, where the second-grade audience works in small groups to reflect on the completed fairy tales. The K-2 draft art rubrics ask students to think about their learning by responding to prompts connected to the POL. The Red Drawing reflection at WHS is a strong, deeply thoughtful student response that addresses a wide range of artistic elements and skills.
- The Westlake Foundation and University programs at WMS explicitly teach POL skills to middle school students. In the sixth grade, they focus on qualities, and, in seventh and eighth grade the POL is connected to content area study.

Recommendations

- Mount Pleasant has created a series of important documents to support the implementation of performance-based learning. They are intended to serve one another and to ensure clarity around goals, objectives, and skill development. Consider how the creation of a through-line across the documents may serve to clarify their purpose. Designing tasks that reflect their intentions is made easier when complex connections are understood. Also, think about how the documents might create unintended implementation consequences. Might there be gaps across them that need to be filled? Consider identifying how students are central to their purpose and reflect on changes that may need to be made in order to amplify their role.
- Related to the above recommendation is a consideration around unpacking the qualities of the POL. Consider ways to deepen understandings of it, and how they can be made manifest in PBL. Mount Pleasant may want to partner with districts, like North Salem and Brewster, which have been deeply immersed in this work for some time.
- Assessment tasks throughout the district are primarily summative. Most tests and rubrics shared with us measured progress at the completion of a unit or a performance-based task. Ongoing formative assessment, which seeks to measure how

students are responding while learning is taking place, was less prevalent. Consider how the use of formative assessment can support authentic learning by providing specific and actionable feedback in real-time. This allows for adjustments to be made in the learning process that positively impact the purpose and the response to instruction. Consider also how formative assessment can support metacognitive reflection throughout a task or unit of study. The ability of students to think critically about their efforts throughout the learning process will prepare them to transfer skills both across disciplines and in the real world. And, consider the role of student work in providing authentic data to measure what children know, understand, and are able to do.

- As noted in the commendations, rubrics are a powerful and dynamic assessment tool that are particularly impactful when measuring growth in performance tasks. In order to better align them with the core competencies and the POL, consider adding criteria that are specifically tied to language in both documents. Also, think about how rubrics can be used to engage students in purposeful metacognitive reflection that leads to a thoughtful consideration of what has been mastered and what continues to need to be developed. Consider how rubrics allow students to become more independent and self-directed as they choose next steps to further their understandings.
- When embarking on an expansive instructional and cultural shift the development of a systemic common language around the terms that drive it is critical. The creation of shared definitions for terms such as authentic, performance-based, assessment, inquiry, voice, choice, metacognition, and the qualities of the POL, avoid ambiguity and serve to make certain that critical vocabulary is interpreted across the schools in the same way. All stakeholders benefit from the creation of a common language. Its use ensures important uniformity across disciplines and schools, facilitating coherence in instruction, assessment, discussions, decision-making, and problem-solving. It also prevents the conflation of language that may seem similar but, in fact, is quite different (the use of voice and choice is one example). Consider a process to co-construct these definitions. Think how teaching and learning may be positively impacted when faculty collaborates across grades, departments, and buildings to come to a consensus on the language they are using. Consider also, how the evidence that was gathered for this visit can be used to anchor vertical conversations.
- Community support is essential to the success of any large-scale change. In order to create stakeholder buy-in, a new communication strategy may need to be developed that is engaging and that reflects the organic nature of this process. Parents acknowledge that the district has shared the POL, but those who had more extensive knowledge of it and the strategic plan had attended presentations at Board of Education meetings. Consider auditing existing forms of communication to assess their

effectiveness. Think about how to contextualize and enculturate the POL in report cards, during parent-teacher conferences, in school and classroom newsletters, and through the use of social media. Consider the creation, for example, of hashtags for each attribute for use on platforms like Instagram. This will enable the schools to post engaging, authentic examples of student learning related to the POL in real-time. Consider how the Parent-Teacher Association can partner with the district in the dissemination of important information.

- The district has a timeline for the implementation of performance-based learning. Consider sharing that with the faculty. Allowing them the opportunity to provide feedback on the process may support continued engagement in and enthusiasm for the work.
- Consider adopting one framework for the design of performance-based assessments. Consider engaging teachers in this work. This may demonstrate the value the district places on providing agency for them to exercise their professional judgment and, as a strategy, align strongly with the qualities on the POL.
- The district is implementing a new faculty leadership model and a professional learning structure. Consider tapping in-house expertise to support this work. There are teachers in every building who are creating and assessing dynamic performance learning. Think about how they may be leveraged to provide collaborative support to their colleagues. Consider the use of laboratory sites in each school where faculty may learn from and with each other.
- Supervising new initiatives provides opportunities for professional learning and capacity building for both administrators and faculty. It is most effective when it is intended to be a collaborative effort, offering the guidance, the mentorship, and the resources necessary to move implementation forward. And it may be most powerful when supervisors are frequently visiting classrooms and actively engaging in the work that students and teachers are doing. Consider structures, like instructional rounds, to maximize your time in buildings. And, consider how creating “look-fors” to guide this work will allow you to be explicit in providing feedback that will positively impact teaching and learning.
- The faculty has begun the integration of the competencies and the POL qualities into their units of study. This is complex work that requires time, a scarce resource. It may best serve the district to identify staff that can mine the curricula and conduct a gap analysis, ensuring that skill development is well integrated into it. Consider the use of a vertical team that may include, for example, elementary content leaders and secondary department heads who can use existing documents, like the POL progressions, to backward map qualities across the instructional scope and sequence.

Essential Question #2

To what extent is our system prepared to grade, report, and provide feedback on student performance and progress towards the competencies and the Portrait of a Learner?

In considering the answer to this Essential Question, the district has asked the Consortium team to consider the following queries:

- Is the system beginning to shift from a more traditional, standardized approach to assessment?
- Do students see value and meaning in the feedback they receive from their schools/teachers?
- Are there examples with the system/region upon which to build capacity?

The use of feedback to gauge student growth on performance-based tasks was covered extensively in the response to the first essential question. The essence of this query is to look more deeply at systems and the role they have in ensuring that all students are getting the support they need to understand their learning successes and challenges.

It is the vision of the district to provide the resources needed to make systemic change. It has reallocated assigned time for teachers to collaborate. This will allow for both more horizontal and vertical work to take place. Faculty that were interviewed are looking forward to having more time to spend with their colleagues. As one elementary special area teacher shared, "There is so much to do. The time I have is spent planning. I would love the opportunity to work with my colleagues, particularly the teachers whose classes I teach. I want to design experiences that can support and extend the work they are doing."

The district has been considering strategies for helping faculty to shift how feedback is delivered. It has been noted here that there is ongoing work being done across all schools to align report cards and comments to the POL. There is very early, aspirational thinking about the creation of a "parallel" report card at the high school that would be competency-based. It would complement, but not replace, the high school transcript. As implementation of performance-based learning continues, the district is looking to use the POL to support all students in reflection and self-assessment. Administrators have noted that some POL qualities may be easier to measure (collaborator, problem-solver, critical thinker). Stakeholders hope that the creation of the POL progressions will serve to support the measurement of all skills.

All teachers provide feedback to their learners but approaches vary widely across the district. While the majority of feedback is tied to content acquisition, there are efforts made to address the POL. At the secondary level, there is a significant focus on measuring content knowledge. Scaffolds are in place to both deliver instruction and assess its impact. Qualities of the POL are discussed, at times, in relation to the learning expectations some teachers have for their students. One English teacher stated, "When I'm teaching Romeo and Juliet, it looks different in my collaborative class. I have to give them a template to analyze a scene. I have to talk a lot about resilience to help them want to stick with it." In an honors English class, students prepared and performed the funeral speeches in Julius Caesar. The teacher shared, "I work the POL in organically. I do not need to point to it. The kids don't need that." A World Language teacher engages in explicit instruction on the qualities. She uses exit tickets for student reflection. A special educator said, "All kids need options to show what they can do. I go over the POL constantly. It helps build their confidence."

In the elementary schools, there are rubrics used to provide feedback at the end of a unit of study. Formative feedback is delivered mainly in small groups and in individual conferences. Elementary teachers feel that they know their students' learning strengths and challenges. When asked if their children could speak to them, most of the faculty believed that largely depended on their age. One teacher noted, "Younger kids don't always have the language to describe what they have learned. By third grade, they get better at it."

As discussed throughout this report, rubrics are used in many classes. Secondary teachers have begun to work on common rubrics. There is a common writing rubric used at both WMS and WHS. The Enduring Issues essay used in social studies is shared by the department.

Families have expressed their desire to have a better understanding of teaching and learning expectations. As noted earlier in this report, they need further clarity on processes to gauge student growth. They are eager to be immersed in the critical competencies and the POL, and are looking to the system to make this happen. They want to know how to provide feedback at home that will support their child to be successful in school.

To support the district in preparing its system to grade, report, and provide feedback on student performance and progress towards the competencies and the Portrait of a Learner, the Consortium offers the following commendations and recommendations:

Commendations

- WHS has an instructional framework that allows time for feedback and group work in its classes. This enables the high school to have a shared school-wide structure to support the shift from traditional, more summative assessment to those that may allow teachers and students to consider learning while it is taking place.
- Middle and high school students spoke to the value of WMS's Foundation and University program. They felt it gave them a strong grounding in the POL. The children that the Consortium team spoke to could make connections to it and noted that the feedback they were receiving in their classes (particularly those that were at advanced levels) used language connected to qualities.
- As noted in the commendations for the first essential question, there are some strong models of performance-based learning across the district. These may be used to build capacity in the system to shift from traditional to more progressive grading and reporting strategies. The STEAM program at CES, the Advanced Placement Seminar, Science Research and the Career Research Academy at WHS, some self-contained special education classes, and the Socratic Seminar in the tenth grade have structures that provide formative, actionable feedback tied to authentic contexts. There are also resources, like the K-12 STEAM Planning Tool, that reflect best practice in PBL design.
- The work that has been done to align reporting structures to the POL and the core competencies has been commended above. The elementary schools have created a standards-based report card that provides families with feedback on five of the nine POL qualities. WMS and WHS have begun conversations on aligning their comments to the language of the core competencies and the POL. These initial steps demonstrate that the system is beginning to shift their report structures to better represent its values and strategic plan.

Recommendations

- Rubrics were addressed at length in the commendations and recommendations tied to both essential questions. The extent to which children assign value to the feedback they receive in them is generally undocumented although secondary students and a few parents spoke to their use. There is also a need (outlined above) to consider how to include in the rubrics more opportunities for learners to engage in metacognitive reflection. Consider creating a vertical team to analyze the rubrics in use against the core competencies and the POL. How might it lead to the creation of a continuum to develop student ability to think about their thinking and to use the feedback they

receive to plan their instructional next steps? Consider how the development of a metacognitive continuum can address issues raised by elementary teachers.

- Concerns related to change are a manifestation of uncertainty. It often stems from teachers' experience of a lack of cohesion and stability in the system. The district has worked hard to support teachers in managing change at their pace. They have a tremendous amount of buy-in and only a minority of faculty who do not trust that these shifts will endure. Consider how to put additional structures in place to allow concerns to surface in respectful and productive ways. Protocols can support this work. The **Reflective Conversation Protocol**, for example, from the School Reform Initiative can be used to address concerns and to engage all faculty to move from an early understanding of initiatives and processes to an examination of in-depth implications.
- The implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at the middle school successfully enculturated a significant amount of instruction related to performance-based learning. As a result, WMS faculty can draw parallels between the core competencies and the POL, and may be better equipped to continue to employ less traditional feedback strategies. Consider reflecting on the original IB implementation process and identify the strategies within it that were successful. Consider, if they can be used to support the strategic plan and the POL, and if they can help the system in realizing its goals and objectives.
- Secondary students in advanced-level courses feel deeply connected to school and best equipped to self-manage their learning. Many believe they have the skills necessary to make received feedback actionable. Consider strategies that put all students at the center of the learning process. Think about the instruction and the tools they may need to enable them to develop dispositions to see value and meaning in what they are asked to do and how they are prompted to respond to it. Consider the structures in place in advanced placement and honors courses, and in electives that grow self-actualized learners. Think of how to integrate them into instruction for all children.
- It has been stated throughout this report that work is being done to align report cards with the core competencies and the POL. Consider strategies to ensure that all students are provided feedback on skills acquisition. Consider how to support families in understanding what is being measured and how.
- In the recommendations for Essential Question #1, a suggestion was made to create look-fors for administrative classroom visitations. Consider how the creation of a similar document for teachers may be used to assess student growth toward the competencies and POL qualities. Consider also designing guiding questions that all faculty might use as they engage in feedback conversations with students. The formative data that these answers may provide can be used to assess the system's implementation efforts.

- Most large, systemic change requires both the integration and adoption of new processes and procedures. It is important to understand the purpose of both if efforts are to be successful. Integration involves incorporating new elements into existing systems or processes in a seamless and interconnected manner. Adoption focuses on bringing new practices, technologies, or ideas to organizations. Consider identifying which components of the strategic plan, the core competencies, and the POL can continue to be easily incorporated into the system's beliefs on teaching and learning. Also, consider what aspects of the work need to go through an adoption process and what that might look like. Doing so may allow priorities to surface and may provide a direction to differentiate professional learning. Think too about the resources being purchased to support this work. Can they be integrated seamlessly or do they require new learning in order to be used?
- In order to ensure that POL is successfully enculturated by the system, it may be used to inform a wide range of decisions being made by the district. These include, but not limited to, curriculum writing, mapping and review, resource purchasing, and the processes that drive assessment.
- Assessment measures student response to teaching and learning. It can also support the district in measuring where it is on its implementation journey. Consider asking the question, “What are our current assessments telling us about the student experience?” Consider collecting additional formative forms of data and/or evidence that will capture the results of instruction in a more immediate, timely way. Interest inventories, for example, can provide valuable feedback on the impact of performance-based learning. They can also support the creation of tasks that are more deeply connected to what students value. They may provide information that can serve to make tasks more authentic. And, consider how the collaborative analysis of student work can provide important insights into student growth.

Conclusion & Appreciation

During our three days in the district, the Consortium team observed and met with faculty members, administrators, students, parents, and Board of Education members. We looked at a wide range of evidence. Every one of our needs were met by the excellent staff members who planned the visit.

A special thanks go to everyone on the Mount Pleasant Tri-State Steering Committee who made this visit incredibly easy and very enjoyable. But, we would be remiss if we didn’t single out Anna Nazaruk for going way above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that we wanted for

nothing. We were delighted with her home baked treats and we are extremely grateful for all she did for us. Her sincere cheerfulness created a warm and welcoming environment. And, last but not least, we send thanks to Dr. Adam Bronstein whose extraordinary organizational skills made this visit go off without a hitch.

The work done in Mount Pleasant is thoughtful, thorough, and creative. The teaching and learning changes being made are illustrative of their organizational values but particularly represent the ability to be tenacious in the pursuit of growth and continuous improvement.
The district is poised to meet its goals. It has identified the people, the structures, and the resources needed to take that giant leap into the future.

Mount Pleasant is a happy place. Key stakeholders believe in its work and are there to support its journey. This does not happen by accident. There is something the district is doing right that has enabled it to begin to tell its new story. As it unfolds, do not be modest. Achievements and challenges should be shared with pride. Ask for help and feedback as needed. The staff, students, families, and community members are by Mount Pleasant's side.