

Categorized Staff Responses from September Break-out Sessions

Curriculum:

Consistent Curriculum:

- Align curriculum
- Aligned curriculum
- Curriculum scope and sequence for each grade level to master each year; build proficiency level across the school system
- All grade levels and all subjects need to integrate math and ELA; everything contributes to our learning experience.
- Acknowledge music, art, the arts, and physical education as an important part of our learning experience that will lead to better MCAS scores.
- ALIGN CURRICULUM, grade level meetings across elementary schools
- CURRENT instructional materials aligned with district and state frameworks
- Look at curriculum
- Align and measure curriculum and plan
- Aligning curriculum across the district
- Uniform math curriculum, PK – 12
- Horizontal and Vertical Curriculum (elementary all subjects, ELA in HS)
- Uniform writing curriculum PK – 12
- Same across district: teach the same and use the same resources
- Consistent curriculum
- Consistent textbooks
- Unified curriculum across the whole district (subject matter, etc.)
- Consistency through the system starting at elementary School
- Consistency and repetition
- District-wide curriculum by unit with pre-test and post-test, with shared information on how students are doing

Benchmarks:

- Establish more consistent grade level benchmarks
- More specific benchmarks regarding grade level achievement
- Motivational curriculum with Professional Development
- Essential skills – what are they?
- Set consistent standards across content areas that are attainable for all students, i.e. capitalization, end punctuation, words from the question are spelled correctly, etc.
- Standardize K – 4 approaches so all students come into GMS with basic written expression skills – i.e. paragraphing, note-taking, basic sentence construction
- Develop benchmarks for each grade

Expectations:

- Challenge students more
- Higher expectations
- Realistic grading

- Offer more for gifted students at the elementary level
- Bring Algebra back to the 8th grade
- Accelerated and enrichment programs
- Enrichment programs at elementary schools
- Need more offerings at all levels for average students
- Make student accountable and involved
- Mastery Model – identifies problems – go to summer School
- Provide more algebra classes to more 8th graders (more than one class?)
- Set expectations higher

Expanded Time:

- HS/College connections for credit course
- Online activities for the summer
- Afterschool programs (MCAS, homework help)
- Programs: tutoring, summer programs, afterschool programs, grant for costs, “test coaching”, writing skills class
- Suggest all students have summer work; parents made aware and must respond; accountability
- Extend the school year – afternoons, summer – for those who need to improve; make it a must, not optional
- After school MCAS Support: move to earlier grades
- Afterschool programs
- Set up on-line lessons
- For HS – let them take courses at Westfield State that we don’t have here
- Mandatory Pre-K for one year Mandatory K, with a maximum of 15 students
- Afterschool/summer school for student preparation

ELA:

- Improve reading skills: incorporate throughout curriculum and levels
- Have the same reading program for all elementary schools
- Consistency in the reading programs in different schools
- Balanced reading programs
- Back to basics
- Practical, meaningful and authentic reading
- Don’t forget that formal reading instruction through grade 6 is crucial (we discontinue formal program and group kids)
- Why is there no formal reading program?
- Vocabulary development
- Integration of writing into all curriculum areas
- Emphasis on writing early on, with exposure to all types of writing;
- Increase focus on grammar at all levels
- Teach basic grammar
- Writing across the curriculum
- Writing in all curriculum areas should be expected to follow the same model
- More writing in all classes, across curriculum
- Teach skills needed, i.e. similes/metaphors, transition words

- All students should have spelling accountability
- All students should practice writing in all subjects
- More attention to detail and mechanics in earlier grades
- Focus on reading, writing and math at all levels

Misc:

- We're teaching to MCAS rather than what we need to teach
- School to work: review and increase use, possibly model some of activities from career center
- Re-evaluate community service requirement
- For MS – use enrichment more effectively; for HS – use advisory time more effectively
- Electives: limit choices right now

Assessment:

Consistency:

- Consistent district-wide testing (same assessment for all schools)
- Have assessments per grade level: what should that student know at grade 5, etc.
- Early assessment (DIBBLES)
- Scott Forsman entry level testing
- Need a more comprehensive/whole child way to assess performance and achievement
- DRA and DIBELS – Elementary; Gates MacGintie – MS, Reading
- Elementary assessment tool in math
- MCAS, Dibbles, Gates
- DIBELS, Gates, running records
- What is “grade level”? Variety of tests. Authentic assessments, effective assessments
- Ongoing (consistency) of assessment

Use of Results:

- Early identification and remediation
- Ongoing assessment, instruct, revise, assessment – ongoing
- Performances on other standardized tests
- Reading scores
- Periodic testing
- Results of tests
- Motivational assessment
- Student self-assessment
- Ongoing assessment and interpretation of student results, to inform instruction
- Look at last MCAS scores for incoming students; analyze comments to be able to supplement gaps
- Teachers need access to all scores of individual students at the beginning of school year

- Ongoing periodic assessments, (pre and post testing?) tracking frequently and using results to drive instruction Formative assessments that measure cognitive skills
- Frequent and ongoing assessment
- Further assessments – earlier – identify next steps
- Identify students’ reading problems exactly
- Standard assessment at each grade level at end of year determining who has met the grade level standards by the end of the year. And which students will need additional support in regular ed the next year

Misc:

- Tested at an earlier age
- Upgrade technology to provide laptop access for tests
- Assessment, pretest
- Does the “alternative assessment” portfolio program help or hurt the process toward 45% proficiency?
- Alternative assessment tools for subgroups (i.e. special needs students)

Instruction:

Differentiation:

- Assess why particular students do well and try to provide all students with these skills
- Pull students into small groups
- Look more closely at the proficient data to where their weaknesses are
- Focus on deficient areas
- Review individual aspects in each topic/subject and work on deficit areas
- Look at students who are proficient and seek what is lacking to move to advanced level
- Analyzing data to strengths and weaknesses
- High expectations for all
- Increase computer literacy
- Ability grouping showed advanced classes did better
- Concentrate on lower groups that need improvement
- District-wide math and reading grouping by ability
- Some students/buildings are doing ability groupings, giving more students opportunities to excel
- Reading scores
- Periodic testing
- Results of tests
- Ongoing assessment and interpretation of student results, to inform instruction
- Tutorial programs
- Look for reading difficulties really early and do intense intervention
- Continue to look at and use data collection to look at ID factors and changes in family structure, low SES and environmental factors
- Pre-testing: see student level in each area and identify those students who need additional help

- Evaluate student scores compared by/to teacher
- Ability level grouping
- Using assessment data
- Teachers must keep high expectations for all and not accept less.
- Find student strengths and work from there
- Identifying needs and connecting these to resources
- Identify students within the subgroup who have the capability of reaching proficiency
- Inconsistent grading
- Smaller group instruction
- Need to ID subgroups
- Have an educational plan, ID specifically what students needs
- Intervention team and support teams to support all students (not just SPED)
- Monitor progress of all students and follow through to see if interventions work
- More 1:1 and better understanding of what individual kid requires to be able to focus as needed; example, let kid take breaks as needed during the learning process. Really teach to the kids strengths/weaknesses
- Volunteer/Individual tutoring
- Higher expectations at ALL levels
- MS/HS students as reading buddy/mentors in elementary schools
- Catch kids before they fall behind. By grade 8, kids are unwilling to do the work to catch up.
- K and 1st graders need to be observed closely
- At lunchtime, hold small groups such as math club, poetry, etc.
- Increase FES – Foundation for Excellent Schools participation
- MS Community Service students could mentor/tutor younger students
- HS Internships students could work with MS and Elementary School
- FES and Advisor/Advisee could do mentorships with lower grades
- A need for other elementary schools to get some mentors and interns/community service students that Littleville has
- Small group instructions break up class to ability level
- Differentiated Instruction: different homework for different abilities, modification of homework where needed (workload, time, delivery)
- Individualized attention for each student
- Student support centers, small grouping environment
- Differentiated instruction
- Peer coaching – older students with younger students
- Flexible ability grouping
- Cross-grade level experiences: having upper classmen write for under classmen and under for upper
- Identify which students need help in which areas, e.g. content, mechanics
- Review previous writing samples to get to know students
- Early interventions
- Peer revising and editing (5 – 12)

- Keep high expectations
- Raise expectations for what is acceptable in writing (provide examples of what's acceptable to hand in)
- Consistent grading in elementary leading to Middle and High
- Challenge at all levels
- Portfolios should be carried through by all

Parent/Community Involvement

- Parent involvement
- Get parents invested in their child's success
- Consistent parent information night on strategies at home
- Form parent groups – help them to develop good attitude toward school, understand curriculum, MCAS
- Parent volunteers
- Provide mentoring with adult volunteers by having them share one or one or whole class.
- More parent outreach (hard to change what parents grew up with)
- More positive communication
- More alliance with parents
- Parents need to take more responsibility for child's learning; parent support groups need to form and teach parents how to help child's education.
- Volunteers
- More support for parents via the School
- Provide parent information
- Make HS more parent friendly
- Parent involvement
- Parent involvement
- Community involvement
- Must get them school ready through outreach to families: short homework assignments to facilitate parent and child working together; reading
- Use volunteers to listen to students read
- Encourage parents to read to child when young
- Parents support child's reading; list questions, read together, share!
- Parent must express interest; suggest to parent how!
- Shift some of reading responsibility to parent with reading list and books to take home
- Parent education
- Parent/Adult workshops to increase and promote knowledge
- Increase parental involvement – educate parents about reading
- Train and involve parents
- Help parents, community value reading
- Reading outreach programs for parents
- Draw upon the community as resources of outside interests at all grade levels, i.e. arts council, musicians, elderly, career day
- Volunteers to provide tutoring and help in classroom

- Communicate with parents in both directions
- “knock” on more corporate/industry doors for funding as well as donations and internship possibilities and volunteers to visit various levels throughout the district
- Utilizing community members, staff
- Teachers open to parent request for additional information/homework, etc.
- All levels – use outside people/speakers to enhance what you’re doing; strong parental involvement
- More parental contact – read more with children, bring books home, create reading opportunities
- Connections with town libraries
- Role model supports
- Identify needs of students/what assets do communities have to offer in math, social studies, science
- More parent support
- Home Connection: time to read, support, library
- Strong parental involvement

Testing Items:

- Back Pre-testing: see student level in each area and identify those students who need additional help
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!
- Provide students with expectations of test
- Student accountability throughout levels, not just in HS (Have the test mean something)
- Teachers take/present MCAS seriously
- Students need to be accountable
- Instruct students on how to answer questions, how to take the test, so students are comfortable with the format
- Teach kids how to take the test
- Teach kids test vocabulary
- Have a teacher design the MCAS test !!!!!
- Help kids in Middle School realize that MCAS is important (MS and elementary see 10th grade as a long way away/not real/”can keep taking it”)
- Time management/test taking skills/study skills
- Kids need to be able to better explain how they got the answer in math
- Name an environment that promotes success and importance of MCAS and the testing
- Make them comfortable and want to succeed on MCAS and in life
- Look at last MCAS scores for incoming students; analyze comments to be able to supplement gaps
- Teach to the test to reach 100%
- Analyze the MCAS results
- Use of rubrics
- Testing is stressful for students and teachers need to not portray (?)
- Teach students test-taking strategies “test therapy

- Teachers take test and categorize questions by topic, so they know how to teach toward test
- Put less pressure on students to do well ((help them with test-taking strategies)
- Give practice with same types of questions as on MCAS
- Practice testing early
- Identify how writing is scored/rubric
- Sampling: exposing students to examples of what a “17” looks like
- Practice writing paragraphs on specific subjects (a minimum of 3 paragraphs)
- Teach organizational skills and test taking strategies
- Teacher-made tests vs. standardized tests—disconnect between the two
- Practice test taking in MCAS format
- Examples of MCAS scoring
- Exposing students to MCAS vocabulary
- Look at the trouble spots on the test
- MCAS sampling

Teacher Control?

- Motivate students to reach higher standards
- Not just “skills”, it’s the critical thinking that students need to improve
- Evaluate student scores compared by/to teacher ground knowledge – meaningful experiences from Pre-K level on
- Positive, motivated
- Offer opportunities of what is available
- Need to address borderline students
- Improve critical thinking and problem solving skills
- More writing
- Make advisory “work time not play time”
- Attitudes of people in a school effect childrens’ attitude
- Daily work habits
- Assemblies
- Kids cannot tell time on an old fashion clock – hello???
- Help the kids that need help
- Math: learn basic facts and eliminate calculator
- Provide practice and drills
- All modalities need to be addressed in instruction.
- Keep it fun – games, etc.
- Consistent homework follow through
- Communication and consistency between staff at all levels, to address curriculum throughout the grades
- Focus on what needs improvement most
- Set initial goals that are attainable
- More opportunities to read
- Make reading fun (MS students don’t want to read)
- Practical, meaningful and authentic reading

- Use technology to get kids to read (if tech is part of problem, use it to hook kids; students are used to being entertained)
- Accountable assignments: use students to motivate others to read a book (book talks)
- Book choices of interest available
- More oral reading in class
- Stronger readers help weaker ones
- Comfortable setting for child to read
- Practice reading aloud – mandatory – so that teachers can assess reading progress.
- Convince students to embrace reading as much as they currently embrace sports or video games; ex. A Read-A-Thon Fundraiser
- Resources to help teach comprehension across district; need to work on inferential questions
- MS should spend more time on reading during SSR and have follow-up discussion. Consider reading aloud and discussion.
- Set up reward program (movie passes) etc. Pursue through business donations.
- All grades have a summer reading list with a follow-up in the fall.
- Instill a love of reading in students from K – HS. Make free choice and recommended reading for students and for students and provide choice reading for students through teachers exemplifying their love of reading.
- Teachers to take time and care in reading what their students read and help them make the right choice for a good read
- Summer reading lists K and up (reading out loud for younger)
- Sustained silent reading
- Family reading events
- Author studies
- Visual representation of #s of read books
- Teachers reading to kids
- Increase reading incentives
- Summer reading for all grades
- Utilize library resources, enrichment used for increasing reading skills
- Summer reading program – incentives such as six flags, pizza hut, etc.
- Reading for Fun programs at the elementary level
- Make reading more interactive in the classroom
- More reading time in School District Stress reading
- Reward system for reading (attention, passing out papers)
- School-wide reading motivation – promote fun and interest
- Use of more nonfiction instructional reading at elementary level
- Teach “topic sentence, captions,
- Incorporate learning styles, with each lesson having a component such as touching, board work. Professional development could allow teachers to enrich their skills.
- Online pen pals

- Provide more hands-on activities to address standards in an indirect manner – vocational opportunities here, alternative education opportunities: yoga, meditation, power of laughter and games
- Field trips
- Mentoring
- Community Service
- Educational competitive experiences: science fair, geography bee
- Cultural experience – writing plays, theater arts
- SAC
- Newspaper, band, chorus
- Multi-sensory approaches
- Multi-discipline methodologies
- Assign summer reading books with a paragraph summary to be turned in in September. Awards created for each grade level.
- Teachers stay after for extra help
- Create a game in PE classes
- Online opportunities/grade level interactive websites
- Motivate students/recognition
- Teach kids to balance between school and a life
- Students given chance to work with other students from other places
- Field Trip Opportunities (and afterschool programs, in -school opportunities)
- Make it REAL
- Technology – Use it!
- Give students the opportunity at free time to write an essay that they can relate to their hopes, journaling
- Increase writing, research papers
- Elementary school: pen pals/trucker buddies, possibly journals
- Give a range of topics that interest students, i.e. daily activities (taking care of a pet, personal experience) or a fantasy (no subject, give students a chance to work from their stream of consciousness);
- Don't make writing a chore
- Show them what a good response looks like; model with explanations
- Daily writing
- Penmanship and proper pencil grip
- Relevant writing
- Encourage the habit of low stakes writing, i.e. conversational journals
- Writing that is more personal, authentic
- Write daily
- READING! Active, respond to it
- Publications available
- Storytellers, illustrators
- Technology of all types
- Accountability for content, neatness, and structure
- Start writing earlier
- Show students that the state wants and give them the formula

- MS efforts in Open Response
- Teach test-taking skills
- MCAS vocabulary and showing students how to use it/understanding the vocabulary in the directions; Building of math concepts necessary for vocabulary
- Connect reading and writing to personal interests (more choices)
- Writing and publishing their own books
- Encourage non-writers by initially scribing/typing their words so they can see clean copies
- Writing Process and basic grammar skills
- Vocabulary work
- Literary analysis
- More writing and journal writing
- Projects: letter writing, brainstorming, webbing, reading skills, read to write, measurement tools, model good writing, writing support visuals in classroom, penmanship, organization of writing, sharing writing samples
- Journal writing
- Response journals
- Different writing styles
- More opportunities to write and read, develop “voice” in the writers
- Practice writing in different genres/flexibility
- Teach skills needed, i.e. similes/metaphors, transition words
- Need to practice writing with pen and paper in a “timed” situation (simulating test taking)
- Start writing EARLY – preschool/K
- Practice, practice, practice
- Positive, constant, constructive feedback
- Models
- Noticing writing styles in literature
- Reading a variety of genres
- Writing/typing process across the board
- Daily journal writing
- Connection of writing to community, i.e. monthly school newsletter done by kids, published class book put in school libraries. Hold to acceptable standards.
- Find out what motivates children to write at different levels (i.e. to play on a team, get a reward)
- Finding motivation intrinsically vs. extrinsically
- Staff interaction and discussion
- Writing competition
- Staff tends to be possessive of their content and unwilling to align to others
- Constant exposure to testing format
- Exposing students to what is needed for passing work

Misc:

- Grades meet together on late start days

- Dress codes
- Literacy initiatives like one book, one community to increase both reading and sense of community
- Question the validity of testing all disabled children
- Do we effectively teach the skills necessary where the information we provide to kids can be taken to the next step?
- COMMUNICATION between teachers, especially between schools; time is needed
- At elementary level, days are too chopped – speech, OT, etc.; spend more time on developing skills
- Extend the school year – afternoons, summer – for those who need to improve; make it a must, not optional
- Encourage excellence in education by encouraging staff to become aware of their strengths and their students strengths and weaknesses, and realize that different teachers work well with some subgroups than others, and that we do the best we can by showing our love of learning.
- Regionalize: regional elementary school, regional curriculum with assessments, tools and materials
- What do we teach? So kids can be proficient
- Look at over time
- Don't forget that formal reading instruction through grade 6 is crucial (we discontinue formal program and group kids)
- Work with town libraries to conduct community-wide reading event, e.g. "One District, One Book"
- District reading incentives
- It starts earlier – early intervention with staff and resources
- Promoting libraries and reading through community
- Provide liaison between student and teacher
- Sharing resources and knowledge with other classrooms
- Internet access for all
- Utilize library
- Afterschool program/life skills
- After-school opportunities
- Tutoring – voluntary and paid
- Afterschool programs: tutoring could be volunteers or teachers
- Homework help afterschool
- Update constantly

Other:

Professional Development:

- Professional development for teachers (taught specifics to teach kids to pass the tests)
- Professional development
- Professional development to address needed student skills
- More professional development for PARAPROFESSIONALS

- Professional development for best practices to teach reading
- Staff training in reading problems
- Teacher training in standards of MCAS
- Opportunities for staff sharing with other staff, even other districts
- More educational/trainings for adults in and out of the building; all staff trained and training offered again and again and again
- Professional Development CHOICES
- Faculty training/need more time to plan implementation

Resources:

- Scheduling: smaller class sizes; (HS 15 – 1 ratio is misleading)
- Extra money for extra school help
- Bring in resources
- Desirable pupil/teacher/support ratios
- Resources must be available to all
- Early support and intervention, social, nutrition, health, etc
- Improve library access (overcome transportation after school)
- Have MS/HS library open AFTER SCHOOL (increased staffing)
- Ideal: 1 to 1 tutoring
- Textbooks, instructional materials
- Low pupil/teacher ratio, “hype it”, reward effort!
- More support at individual level of student – smaller class, lower student/teacher ratio
- More support staff to help raise level (remedial teachers, more paras)
- More behavioral aides to assist in classrooms
- Data Warehousing
- Afterschool help/MCAS program
- MCAS prep during the day
- Restore reading teachers
- Reorganize the school district: K – 6, 7 – 12; (6th graders not ready for middle school; the “foundation is still wet
- Resources (\$) are being provided in the wrong areas (not basics)
- If at 5th or 8th grade tutoring
- Resources to help teach comprehension across district; need to work on inferential questions
- MCAS specific resources for reading instruction
- Need more informational text resources at elementary level
- Separate lending library so books don’t get lost over the summer
- Provide quality grade level and ability reading materials.
- Provide time for reading enjoyment through FREE library time; make the library an inviting place.
- Increased reading support
- Reading teacher at middle school
- Free up teachers and support staff to focus more on kids
- Decrease paperwork (IEP)
- Middle/Afterschool program
- Restore reading teachers

- Afterschool and wrap around program does remediation and homework help
- High school has afterschool help/MCAS academic support
- Apply for grants which tie real-life (practical) opportunities to the curriculum (demonstrations, site visits, etc.)
- Inform staff of smaller/classroom-based grants that are available
- Summer support classes
- Use of paraprofessional staff for individual or small group instruction
- Qualified/trained professionals
- Sufficient resources/technology
- Balance finances to focus on weak areas, yet provide opportunities for
- Middle/High after school
- Hiring additional PE staff
- Elementary Adjustment Counselors
- Software for specific practice
- Phone in classrooms to more parent contacts easier
- Need time/direct instruction on classroom survival skills like attending, listening, sitting
- After school programs
- Summer programs
- Online activities, courses
- Textbooks

Non-assigned:

- Use strengths to pull up weaknesses
- Find models in other district
- The entire community must support academic initiatives and take responsibility for learning: students, parents, staff, etc.
- Increase the number of parents that come to conferences, parent nights/support
- Strong library programs tend to show positive results regarding assessments (district—wide)
- Vocational schools – teaching trades
- SPED may choose their scribe
- Too many learning styles
- Multiple choice
- Mandatory before or after school help programs
- Primary student (?) for getting an aide in the classroom should be smaller than older grades
- 100% realistically and statistically illogical and improbable goal
- Special education
- More students with severe disabilities may need to be given an alternative assessment
- ? test to come out of MS
- Alternative placing
- Not fair that each group is judged separately
- Test is being tested: huge variance in pass rates from year to year

- Decrease MCAS pressures to prevent parent and child anxiety
- Difficult for SPED kids to pass
- Supports in place to catch kids where they fall behind
- Elementary staff has put much effort into this; need support from parents
- Town library and college partnerships with the schools to offer enrichment
- Speakers/programs to expose
- Elementary some minimal PE
- Trade free parking for HS students that mentor or tutor elementary students in math, English/reading or have a school van bring HS students to other schools
- We're assuming you mean improve the opportunities. . .
- Send contingents to "sell" what we already do (i.e. afterschool programs) so both state and private organizations can continue to fund them
- Non-competitive activities after School
- Community Service
- Ensure positive staff morale
- If we have more expectations on us, what do we give up
- Breakfast in school, snack in high School District Use recess time for more directed/use to teach play skills, social skills, to teach planning and thinking skills
- Very important to have more time to implement new strategies
- Clubs
- Integration: HS – Mutual Planning Time, Elementary across grade levels
- Teacher leadership
- Teach basics in 4
- Science and technology requirements for MCAS
- Small percentage (groups) struggling hurts school what ESL students skew #s (struggling vs. advanced)
- Special Ed students need an alternative assessment (unrealistic to expect same performance)
- Teach to the test?
- Even lower levels need to follow expectations
- Alternative
- CRISS: Content Reading Instructional Support System