

2013-2014

**SOUTH NEWTON
MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT
PLAN**

MISSION STATEMENT:

Making Meaningful Connections

The South Newton Middle School staff believes that making meaningful connections with their students will promote positive and meaningful academic, physical, social, and emotional growth. These connections are made through the

daily advisory program as well as interactions throughout the school day. SNMS staff additionally believes that making meaningful connections with fellow staff, parents, and community stakeholders is an essential extension of their relationships with students. Students will benefit from this commitment to connections.

School and Community Information

South Newton Middle School is located near Kentland in northwest Indiana, approximately 90 miles south of Chicago, and 100 miles northwest of Indianapolis. The middle school has an enrollment of 196 students, and the entire school corporation has an enrollment of 889. While South Newton Middle School is physically attached to the elementary school and high school, it retains its own address and identity. The middle school school has 12 full time teachers, a middle school principal, and a middle school guidance counselor. Twelve additional teachers share high school and middle school duties. The middle school is technologically strong, with each teacher having his or her own laptop on which electronic records and a grade book using the school-wide software for such tasks are kept. Additionally, teachers have access to wireless slates to project information that can be manipulated and revised on screen using the ceiling-mounted projector that allows content from the slate or the computer to be projected on a screen or whiteboard. Two computer labs are housed in the middle school for middle school use, and four other labs in the high school are also available for middle school use. Most teachers have an iPad for their professional use, and several teachers have access to other technologies that they have requested (e.g. document cameras, Appletv, iPod lab, touchscreen television, etc.) Middle school teachers underwent significant professional development on implementing and transitioning to the Common Core State Standards during the 2011-12 school year, and several teachers attending the Curriculum Institutes National Conference on the CCSS in June of 2012. The South Newton School Board adopted the English/Language Arts Common Core standards (including the literacy standard) for the K-12 corporation. Middle school teachers have been following the CCSS transition guidance issued by the IDOE since the 2011-2012 school year.

The school community consists of three small towns (Kentland, Brook and Goodland), and surrounding rural areas of Morocco and York township. The economy remains mostly agricultural with a few small industries in the area that manufacture plastic and aluminum components. The school community is becoming more diverse, and currently the middle school population is 89% Caucasian, and 8% Hispanic, and 2.5% Black. The free and reduced lunch percentage is 57%.

School Improvement at South Newton Middle School

School improvement is important to the teachers and administrators at South Newton Middle School. During the 2008-2009 school year, a climate audit was conducted to determine certified staff's perceptions. Administrative turnover impeded consistency in regularly establishing and executing a unified school improvement plan. In this audit, strengths and successes were noted, and areas of

concern and needed improvement were highlighted. The audit and ensuing discussion allowed the new administrator to better understand the programs in place and make necessary changes based upon teacher feedback.

While some changes in the middle school occurred, successful practices have also been continued. One goal in scheduling classes for the 2009-2010 school year was to get middle school teachers teaching as many middle school classes as possible, eliminating some of the shared staff for academic courses. Middle school staff continues to work with elementary personnel to provide an effective transition program for fifth graders who will be moving into sixth grade. The school improvement committee met several times through the year to discuss the mission and vision of the middle school for the future. During this time, they, at the principal's direction, focused on what Jim Collins, author of *From Good to Great*, calls the Hedgehog Concept. In adapting this business principle to the public sector, they determined the need to focus at what they could be the very best as a middle school.

After considerable individual contemplation and group discussion they determined that they were most deeply passionate about making SNMS a safe, enjoyable place where students knew that adults cared about their success and happiness. They further identified that as a school and staff, they could be the very best in the state of Indiana in connecting each student with an adult who would establish and maintain a deep, meaningful relationship, promote strong character, and help advance academics. The committee finalized their vision of the hedgehog concept by indicating that their "resource engine" was driven by their care and commitment *for* the community and *from* the community and by valuing the need to grow our own community members so that they remain productive people who enhance our community through their productivity here or in whatever community they eventually work and reside.

In considering the hedgehog concept identified by the school improvement committee, members offered a revised mission statement that captured the essence of what they felt was most important: "Making Meaningful Connections." The committee, and subsequently the entire staff, felt this mission capitalized on what they believed they could do best and felt the mission indicated a variety of ways in which meaningful connections could be made: advisor to advisee; colleague to colleague; school to parent; school to community, and student to student.

As a result of the school improvement committee's work, significant changes in the schedule for the 2010-2011 school year were made. Class periods were shifted to allow for a daily 30-minute advisory program. Each student was assigned a grade-level advisor who serves as a mentor and advocate to each student. A four-member advisory collaboration team was scheduled to meet a period a day for the entirety of the 2010-2011 school year. The advisory collaboration was finessed and turned over to a two-person team during 2011-2012, and finally a one person leader in the 2012-2013 school year. This period is devoted to developing the vision, themes, and daily lessons presented each day during the advisory period. The principal serves in an ex-officio capacity, providing periodic input and authorization for materials, programs, and necessary schedule changes. The focus for advisory days include reading day, wellness/health lessons, "Get 'R Done" day, Seven Habits lessons, and a fun day where mini clubs or school-wide programs are scheduled. Because the school was unable to attract a candidate with a

valid health licensure or endorsement, the decision to embed health standards within the advisory program was made as a result of conversations with officials at the state department of education.

In identifying an appropriate character education program with which to begin each week, the staff committed to an opportunity proffered at the generosity of a few community members. Over three-quarters of the middle school staff participated in Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* training. This training, in turn, certified them to teach the program *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* to their advisory students. Support staff such as paraprofessionals and administrative assistants were also offered this training in order to develop a comprehensive program that encompassed the entire middle school. Using the materials developed by Franklin Covey and purchased with local grant monies, the advisory program for Seven Habits became established.

Additional changes in the usual schedule became necessary. Because of the absence of health as a six-week rotation class, all three grade levels had the opportunity for change. The sixth grade had previously undergone four 9-week rotation classes: Health, Art, Music, and Physical Education. Health was replaced with a STEM 6 course based upon the Carnegie-Mellon curriculum written for LEGO robotics engineering. Because no licensing standard has been established by the DOE, the course is taught by any teacher licensed in Science, Technology, or Math. The current instructor holds a math license. In preparing for the 1:1 environment, a digital literacy class was also added to the rotation for sixth grade students.

The seventh grade rotations were altered slightly as a result of staffing challenges. The mathematical practices class was eliminated and no other rotation replaced it, resulting in the following courses for 7th grade students: Art 7, Physical Education 7, Digital Literacy 7, FACS 7, and STEM 7. The 8th grade rotations remained the same: Art 8, Physical Education 8, Intro to Technology 8, Agriculture 8, Digital Literacy 8, and Spanish 8. Every effort is made to ensure that all rotation sections are given an equal number of days.

South Newton Middle School is committed to providing relevant Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. Capital projects funds helped procure laptops and LEGO robotic kits to facilitate teaching the Carnegie-Mellon Robotic Engineering curriculum that correlates with these materials. Cluster grouping rotation groups of high ability students further enhanced the instructional dynamic.

A strong commitment to hiring high quality staff and appropriately inducting them into our school culture still exists. Every first-year teacher to South Newton still receives a copy of a book authored by Harry Wong entitled, [The First Days of School](#). Additionally, a new teacher orientation program is held by lead teachers prior to the start of the school year.

For the 2013-14 school year, NWEA testing was replaced by Acuity testing. Teachers in the following subject/grade levels administer the test according to the schedule distributed by the Indiana Department of Education: Language Arts 6-8, Math 6-8, Geography 7, and Science 6. Teachers received

a one-day training on accessing and utilizing reports in Acuity prior to the start of the 2013-14 school year. All teachers have immediate access to their reports and are expected to use this data to inform their instruction.

Additionally, all Language Arts teachers utilize the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) up to three times a year to measure each student's Lexile score. The Lexile was a metric teachers previously accessed through NWEA testing; the purchase of SRI via a 4-Star Grant allowed teachers to continue measuring a monitoring student growth in reading.

The data from these assessments, together with data from ISTEP, are used to determine academic placement and to monitor and evaluate student growth.

Practices for Improving Student Achievement

1. Effective Teacher Training – Utilization of professional development, department meetings, and faculty meetings in addition to participation in professional development opportunities, including conferences serves to update our staff on the most modern, effective teaching techniques to address the needs of an educationally diverse student body.
2. Regular Diagnostic Testing – The testing through Acuity will facilitate analysis of and identification of students who need a different placement in a course or program. Such testing will also help teachers see which practices are resulting in improved scores and which practices are not. Acuity also offers real-time feedback on each student's mastery progress on the Indiana Academic Standards for each course tested. Finally, this data will allow students to see and understand their patterns of achievement, setting the groundwork for setting their setting academic goals that are attainable.
3. Student Accountability – Students not succeeding in the middle school are provided extra help after school through the Rebel Rescue program and may be placed in alternative programs to accelerate preparation for high school success.
4. Advisory Program—Connecting students with advisors who oversee their progress and serve as an advocate emphasizes the importance of doing one's best.
5. Frequent, Timely Feedback – Students want to know how they are doing. Through frequent testing and regular, prompt feedback, they will know.
6. Data-Driven Decision Making-- Decisions about best practices, curricula, textbook selection, and other school practices are based on how these practices have or have not affected student learning.
7. Students who demonstrate the ability are accelerated so that they may complete algebra during their eighth grade year, earning a high school credit and getting the opportunity to complete the ECA in algebra.

8. Students in 7th and 8th grade whose Acuity, SRI, and ISTEP Language Arts scores demonstrate high ability have the opportunity to participate in a two-year gifted and talented Language Arts course.

Academic Expectations for Students

1. Students will demonstrate higher-level thinking and skills.
2. Students will demonstrate the personal responsibility by turning in assignments.
3. Students will develop initial career objectives.
4. Students will become proficient readers, enabling them to make inferences, follow instructions, and solve problems.
5. Student will leave eighth grade academically prepared for high school.

SOUTH NEWTON MIDDLE SCHOOL ACTION PLAN

GOAL #1: Each year, students will improve critical reading and writing skills with a target pass rate in each of the following grade levels:

6th Grade: 90% in Language Arts; 90% in Science

7th Grade: 85% in Language Arts; 80% in Social Studies

8th Grade: 80% in Language Arts

STRATEGIES:

The following strategies have been used to secure improvements in students' language arts achievement:

1. Middle school students visit library bi-weekly during Language Arts Class.
2. 6th grade students have 2 class periods daily to focus on Language

Arts – reading workshop and writing workshop.

3. Sixth, 7th and 8th grade students all take a digital literacy course that encourages students to be good digital citizens and to use digital technology safely and correctly.
4. Each classroom has a collection of self-selected reading books students may check out.
5. The media center hosts and promotes a Scholastic book fair every year; the proceeds from the fair provide teacher-selected books for their individual classroom libraries.
6. *Battle of the Books* competition encourages reading.
7. Sustained silent reading is practiced once a week during advisory.
8. Young Hoosier Book Award voting will be advertised and promoted.
9. *Battle of the Books* competition is expanded to include area schools.
10. Content area teachers, along with language arts teachers, accept responsibility for teaching the literacy standards associated with Common Core State Standards.
11. All language arts teachers adopt and teach the Common Core State Standards for language arts.
12. All teachers across the curriculum will teach and use APA format.
13. The media center will conduct a book trailer contest where students will create book trailers. This will be a joint effort with art classes.
14. Expanded use of technology through the media center such as inner-library loan, book trailers, Inspire, and Battle of the Book reviews.
15. All teachers access student performance and growth using the Learning Connection, Acuity, and SRI data centers for their own classes.

New Strategies include:

1. Teachers will use the Acuity test data to assign instruction in areas of need.
2. Teacher will engage in professional development based on the 1:1 initiative that will be implemented next year.
3. Teachers will use the SRI (Scholastic Reading Inventory) to monitor student growth of Lexile levels.

ACTIVITIES:

1. The media center will carry copies of the Young Hoosier Book Award winners and the Battle of the Books selections.
2. All middle school teachers devise methods by which they may implement critical reading and writing strategies that support the upcoming state mandated testing.
3. All students will take the diagnostic Acuity tests and be assigned instruction in areas of low achievement.
4. All students will take the SRI up to three times a year to monitor Lexile growth.

ASSESSMENTS:

1. ISTEP+ completed by students annually.
2. Students take the common core-aligned ACUITY tests in the fall, winter, and spring each school year.
3. Teacher-created assessments based on Common Core State Standards

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

1. Teachers review and implement usage of a common writing rubric.
2. Teachers learn to proctor the Acuity and use the student's scores.
3. All teachers have access to each student's applied skills language ISTEP+ test for grades 6-8.
4. Teachers review important and relevant language conventions that need to be reinforced in all reading and writing activities and assessments across the curriculum.
5. All language arts and content-area teachers receive training on the common core standards.
6. Teachers will reinforce and practice a shared academic vocabulary.
7. All teachers will receive APA training and apply it in classroom activities.
8. Content and LA teachers continue utilizing the instructional guidance provided by IDOE for Common Core to ensure that relevant Indiana standards on which ISTEP+ focuses are taught while implementing CCSS.

GOAL #2: Each year, students will improve their math skills with a target pass rate in each of the following grade levels:

6th Grade: 90%

7th Grade: 90%

8th Grade: 85%

STRATEGIES:

The following strategies have been used to secure improvements in students' math Scores:

1. Students are challenged with questions that encourage and require higher order thinking skills.
2. Homework is assigned regularly to reinforce classroom lessons
3. Algebraic concepts are reinforced in 6th and 7th grade.
4. Geometric concepts are emphasized and reinforced in 8th grade.
5. Traditional pacing for math allows allow greater time for coverage of basic skills before moving to algebra; the opportunity to take algebra in 8th grade and to take the ECA still is in place for math-able students.
6. Both general education and special education students who do not demonstrate mastery on the ISTEP are required to take a math lab.
7. Teachers access student performance and growth using the Learning Connection.

New Strategies/Interventions:

1. All middle school math teachers incorporate math skills and Common Core State Standards mathematical practices in their curriculum, lessons, and assessments.
2. SMART goals are being introduced and practiced during 6th grade math bell work.
4. All math teachers follow the transition guidance provided by the Indiana Department of Education in preparation for the full implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
5. General education students in math lab will move through a comprehensive curriculum using the Khan Academy and the online program IXL.

6. All 6th grade students and 7th grade math lab students will move through a comprehensive curriculum using Fraction Nation.
7. Teachers will use the Acuity test data to assign instruction in areas of need.
8. Teacher will engage in professional development based on the 1:1 initiative that will be implemented next year.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Teachers will teach students how to identify and define a problem that could then be used to develop a hypothesis, a problem statement, or a story problem.
2. Projects will be offered in math, science and social studies that allow students to work together using problem solving and critical thinking strategies to offer solutions, interpret data, and draw conclusions.
3. Daily bell work assignments target weak areas demonstrated through ACUITY testing.

ASSESSMENTS:

1. ISTEP+ completed by students annually. Results of Common Core-aligned ACUITY and ISTEP+ testing will be used to concentrate on improving student skills in problem areas.
2. Students take the Acuity testing in the fall, winter and spring of each school year.
3. ECA assessment is used as an end of course exam for algebra.
4. Teacher created assessments are based on Indiana Math Standards and on the transitional guidance for Common Core State standards as outlined by the Indiana Department of Education.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

1. Teachers continue to learn how to interpret and use the results of the Common Core-aligned ACUITY test.
2. Math department meetings foster discussion that explores the availability and usefulness of math software.
3. All teachers have access to each student's applied skills math ISTEP test for grades 6-8.

GOAL #3: South Newton Middle School improves daily attendance. The attendance goal for the 2013-2014 school year is 97%.

STRATEGIES:

The following strategies have been implemented to improve the average daily attendance of students:

1. Daily follow through on procedures as outlined in student handbook to verify absences.
2. Communicate to parents the importance of attendance via the middle school Gazette.
3. Post the school-wide and grade level attendance rate each week in the Gazette and on the middle school bulletin board.

4. Implement an anti-bullying program and continue anti-bullying education throughout the school year.

ACTIVITIES:

For positive motivators:

1. Create a safe atmosphere that allows students a positive experience for learning and socializing.
2. Capitalize on positive student-adult relationships developed through the advisory program.
3. Utilize the *Seven Habits for Highly Effective Teens* program to promote a culture of mutual respect.
4. Grade levels that achieve perfect attendance for a day are given a reward the next day.
5. Students with exemplary attendance have their name submitted for a raffle to win a prize.
6. The grade level with the best attendance rate receives a reward at the end of the year.

ASSESSMENTS:

1. Collect and analyze data on attendance, discipline, and student participation.
2. Attendance report filed annually with the State of Indiana.
3. Mid-year review of 1st semester attendance data.
4. The goal will be 97% attendance in the 2013-2014 school year.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

1. Staff member meet 4 times a semester to share concerns, including attendance, regarding students.
2. New staff will be trained on the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* so that they may better instruct the students in this program; returning staff will review the program annually.

Goal #4: Technology: South Newton Middle School certified staff members will create classroom websites. (i.e. Weebly, etc.)

Goal Narrative: Having a website for each classroom will allow students to be more connected to the teacher and the content, along with preparing us for the 1:1 initiative.

STRATEGIES:

1. Certified staff who have experience using Weebly or any other technology based items will assist other teachers and/or lead the professional development meetings in order to have our entire staff on common ground.
2. All certified staff will participate in the professional development to create and improve their classroom website so that every student can be connected to their classroom anywhere that the Internet is available.

ACTIVITIES:

1. All certified staff will be trained in the use of the following applications: Weebly, Quizlet, ThingLink, Symbaloo, Prezi/Glogster, Polleverywhere.com, Class Dojo/Google Apps, Pinterest/Screencast-O-Matic/Animoto, and YouTube/TeacherTube/Ted in Ed.

2. Time and resources will be provided to enable teachers to use these new tools in their curriculum.
3. Technology/ 1:1 device based workshops will be offered to teachers.
4. Teachers will create and begin to modify their website quarterly during Professional Development.
5. Summer workshops will be offered to teachers for training on the new 1:1 devices.