Transition Team Findings and Recommendations

Presentation to Superintendent Cheatham and the MMSD School Board

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Thank You

- We thank:

- Superintendent Cheatham and the Board for the opportunity to serve the students of MMSD

- MMSD staff, school personnel and students for their openness, time, and wisdom

- Greater Madison community for support and input

The Charge

- As Superintendent Cheatham implemented her entry plan for MMSD, the team was asked to provide our collective assistance in data gathering and analyses, collecting information on current research and best practice, and facilitating structured discussions to assist MMSD in crafting a reform agenda that is bold, attainable, and appropriate for student goals- **every student** to graduate **college and career ready**.

Areas of Focus

- We were asked to focus on four primary questions – What is the evidence that MMSD:
  - Has established a strong Core Instructional Program for <u>ALL</u> learners?
  - Has a system of Professional Learning?
  - Is Engaging And Empowering Families and Community?
  - Serves as a Model for a (High) Performance Culture and is organized to support schools?

Methodology

- To complete the tasks assigned, the team brought together research, policy and best practice with:

- Site visits and classroom observations

- Meetings and Interviews with Parents, Central Office Department Leaders and Staff, Teachers, Principals, and Community Representatives

- Quantitative data collected from schools and departments

Area 1: Core Instructional Program
Primacy of the Instructional Core

- *"We will provide every student with well-rounded, culturally responsive, and coherent instruction that leads to college and career readiness."*
  - If MMSD is to go beyond aspirational statements and turn such statements into reality for its students and graduates, the first focus must be on the instructional core – the intersection of the teacher, student and rigorous content.
- Priority Areas
  - Implementation of Common Core*
  - English Language Learners*
  - Special Education Students*
  - Talented and Gifted Students*

Core Instruction Priority Area 1: Special Focus
Implementation of CCSS –

Key Successes

- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Commitment to ongoing professional development, including introduction of culturally responsive training
- Adoption of uniform literacy approach at the elementary level

Primary Challenges

- Limited training and curriculum development for CCSS
- Misplaced autonomy
- Need multi-year strategic implementation plan

Recommendations

- Establish CSSS Implementation Workgroup
- Define effective instruction in MMSD, and include culturally responsive pedagogy/instruction in this definition
- Develop comprehensive Common Core curriculum and assessments
- Consider district "learning sites"
- Bolster Tier 2 interventions

Core Instruction Priority Area 2: Special Focus
English Language Learner Services

Key Successes

- ELL programs promote biliteracy and biculturalism

Primary Challenges

- ELL Programs do not reflect same curriculum as Gen. Ed.
- Need to recruit qualified bilingual staff to serve students
- Access for ELL students to appropriate programs

Recommendations

- Align ELL instruction to the Gen. Ed instructional core
- Develop a district-wide Bilingual/Bicultural Education Policy that recognizes "special responsibility" for ELL student outcomes
- Conduct a feasibility study to ensure adequate resources to provide equity of access to the core ELL instructional program
- Consider transitioning from DBE to DLI/DL programs

Core Instruction Priority Area 3: Special Focus
Special Education Services

Key Successes

- Reputation for commitment to inclusion
- Positive working relationship with parent advocacy group

Primary Challenges

- Over-representation of African American Students
- Special Education for students who also require other services (ELL, TAG)

Recommendations

- Make the Special Education process more transparent to all parents
- Conduct an audit of its special education program to determine compliance with IDEA, especially for overrepresentation of African American students
- Implement plan to ensure needs of *all* students are met (ELL, TAG)

Core Instruction Priority Area 4: Special Focus
Talented And Gifted Services

Key Successes

- Progress being made toward compliance with state law

Primary Challenges

- Underrepresentation of African American and Latino students
- Lack of School Board Policy

Recommendations

- Develop a TAG policy including guidelines for identification and implementation of services; provide professional development.
- Continue implementing improvement plan submitted to DPI
- Determine cause of underrepresentation of African American and Latino students and apply remedy

Core Instruction Special Foci

- Attention is drawn to the areas of special focus to highlight the need to insure that MMSD:
  - Strengthens and focuses coherent curriculum in response to CCSS and other standards
  - Recognizes its special responsibility to underserved students in ELL or underrepresented populations in TAG programs
  - Conversely, investigates the overrepresentation of students, largely African American and Latino, in special education programs
  - Makes a commitment to _all_ students that the _expectation_ is that they will "...graduate **college and career ready**."

Area 2: Professional Learning

- Having a well-defined core instructional focus will, of necessity, inform all aspects of professional learning including hiring, induction, evaluation, and ongoing professional development.

- Priority Areas:
    1. Core Educational Vision
    2. Formative and Summative Evaluation
    3. Induction and Professional Learning*
    4. Hiring Practices*

Professional Learning Priority Area 1:
Core Educational Vision

Key Successes

- Talented workforce with tremendous potential
- Ready for focus and direction
- Structures already in place

Primary Challenges

- Shared vision has been elusive
- "Initiative fatigue"

Recommendations

- Communicate ambitious and coherent educational vision with focused (fewer) goals
- Assess alignment of current initiatives to vision
- Establish and monitor benchmarks for aligning practice to vision

Professional Learning Priority Area 2:
Formative and Summative Evaluation

Key Successes

- Clear evaluation guidelines, esp. for probationary staff
- Enthusiasm for Wisconsin Education Effectiveness System

Primary Challenges

- Not all evaluations are being done, including for probationary

Recommendations

- Ensure timely and substantive evaluations
- Balance formative and summative evaluation
- Develop capacity of principals to conduct evaluations
- Link evaluation to professional learning
- Establish concept of reciprocal accountability

Professional Learning Priority Area 3: Special Focus

Induction and Professional Learning

Key Successes

- Current practices aligned with best practices
- Multiple kinds of support, for principals as well as teachers

Primary Challenges

- Instructional coaching
- Facilitate collaborative teams
- Use common planning time consistently and productively

Recommendations

- Revise induction and mentoring programs to support teachers and principals to meet student goals
- Focus professional development on problems of practice
- Clarify purpose and uses of "Monday afternoon" PD and planning time
- Provide schools with flexibility to create collaborative opportunities for teachers, ie., allocation of elective classes

Professional Learning Priority Area 4: Special Focus
Hiring Practices

Key Successes

- Numerous job applicants
- Commitment to developing a diverse and talented staff
- Retention efforts

Primary Challenges

- Enhance applicant pool in "high need" areas
- Ensure more diverse applicant pool and subsequent hiring
- Provide more flexibility to principals in hiring

Recommendations

- Change recruitment and retention strategies, with focus on more diverse employee force
- Re-evaluate the hiring process and screening tools for alignment with diversity goals
- Increase transparency in hiring and collaboration between central office and principal, with principals able to add candidates to the pool
- Review candidates from alternative certification programs

Professional Learning Special Foci

- To meet its academic and social goals for a diverse student population, MMSD must:
  - Create a seamless process for the aggressive, innovative recruiting, hiring, induction, support and evaluation of quality staff in all positions.
    - Focus professional development on the real problems of MMSD's instructional practice
  - Establish a special focus on the recruit and hiring of a diverse workforce
  - Support and/or join alternative certification networks

Area 3: Family and Community Engagement

- Research on effective schools indicates that schools that are successful with all students have positive home, school, and community relationships. Effective parent engagement can enhance students' outcomes when it is linked to school and districts academic goals.

- Positive parent school relationships are facilitated when schools welcome and encourage parent engagement, effectively communicate with parents, value the strengths and resources of all families, and link parent engagement efforts to issues of student learning.

- Priority Areas
  - Parent Concerns about Disparities in Educational Opportunity*
  - Intercultural ties among parent groups
  - Engagement with parents around CCSS
  - Environment of continuous improvement

Family and Community Engagement Priority Area 1: Special Focus

Parent Concerns about Disparities in Educational Opportunity

Key Successes

- Stated commitment to closing achievement gap
- Online and phone communication with parents

Primary Challenges

- Inconsistent expectations and outcomes across students and schools
- Opportunities for parent involvement inconsistent across schools
- Equitable access to information

Recommendations

- Review and modify parent communication system in collaboration with key stakeholder groups
- Develop and implement culturally and linguistically responsive communication strategies
- Explicate parent information and student expectations/outcomes
- Use technology more effectively and equitably (i.e. revamping website)

Family and Community Engagement Priority Area 2:
Engagement with parents around the CCSS

Key Successes

- Communication occurs in pockets of MMSD due to individual initiative

Primary Challenges

- Teachers are not yet fully trained about CCSS

Recommendations

- Develop parent engagement strategies linked to the CCSS that empower parents to fully advocate for student success
- Provide specific information to parents regarding how to support their children.

Family and Community Engagement Priority Area 3:
Environment of Continuous Improvement

Key Successes

- Beginning to standardize policies and procedures to provide consistency for mobile students

Primary Challenges

- Low expectations of students of color
- Lack of access to rigorous curriculum for students of color

Recommendations

- Ensure that students from all groups have access to challenging learning opportunities
- Use a cyclic process for reflection and continuous improvement to improve outcomes for all students and close the opportunity gap

Engagement Special Foci

- The team's recommendations do *not* focus on a representational or rhetorical example of engagement but posits that parent's participation is based on MMSD's shared goals for student outcomes – college and career ready.

- Is MMSD ready to facilitate the creation of "demand parents," who can advocate for high expectations, support new standards (CCSS) and fully participate in the effort for continuous improvement of MMSD's schools to meet the goals?

Area 4: Performance-Based Culture and Organization

- Our conversations with district and school staff revealed a yearning for clear goals, particularly pertaining to student outcomes, so they could focus their energy, time and resources towards attaining them.

- Priority Areas
  1. Goals
  2. Central Office—Academic*
  3. Central Office—Operations

Culture and Organization Priority Area 1:
Goals

Key Successes

- Developing SMART goals
- Yearning for clear goals
- Support accountability for meeting goals

Primary Challenges

- Reciprocal accountability leading to higher performance
- Clear student outcome goals
- Clear program implementation goals

Recommendations

- Set clear student outcome and program implementation goals
- Develop benchmark metrics
- Develop accountability matrix to ensure that all staff and schools are responsible for student outcomes

Culture and Organization Priority Area 2: Special Focus
Central Office—Academics

Key Successes

- Strong and motivated staff
- Sufficient staff to launch a coordinated effort
- Ready for change

Primary Challenges

- Coordinating services in response to requests/needs of schools
- "Initiative fatigue"
- Major collaborative undertaking at all levels

Recommendations

- Focus the work of Asst. Superintendents and central office in classrooms and schools through strategic support based on school need and capacity
- Involve principals in District decision-making
- Focus all initiatives on a few goals
- Conduct a professional development audit

Culture and Organization Priority Area 3:
Central Office—Operations

Key Successes

- Capable and involved staff open to change
- Healthy financial condition

Primary Challenges

- MUNIS HRIS/Financial system
- Customer service orientation
- IT procurement
- Coordinate and streamline operations

Recommendations

- Survey principals about service
- Reduce operational costs that can be reallocated to instructional support
- Consider central office reorganization

Culture and Organization: Special Focus

- The core instructional goals of MMSD require an inversion of the normal "power" pyramid of school districts, where the schools are at the bottom and central office is at the top.

- The new model calls for central office to serve the needs of the students, teachers, principals and schools and be accountable for the quality and "fit" of that service. The work of the system is in the schools.

- Reciprocal accountability will call for schools and central office to be explicit about their contribution to meeting student goals and be evaluated by that standard.

Bottom Line

- Fewer, but clear and aggressive academic and social goals for *all* students
- Alignment of efforts to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain a highly qualified and diverse workforce
- Creation of "demand" parents and communities to advocate for and support the new vision for a highly rigorous and equitable education
- Reinventing the school system with the students, classrooms and teachers as the center of the "action" in support of graduates who are well rounded and college and career ready.

Reflections and Questions