

This report, conducted by Mass Insight Education, highlights findings by each of the four domains on the School Effectiveness Rubric based on document review, observations, interviews, and focus groups conducted at McGary School on October 4, 2017. The report concludes with recommendations to be considered by the leadership of the school in partnership with the Director of the EVSC Transformation Zone.

Domain 1: Highly Effective Systems and Execution

How do systems for maintaining and maximizing talent management, performance monitoring, academics, and an intentional school environment work in service of student achievement and realizing the goals of the school?

McGary has a School Improvement Plan with strategies in the areas of academics as well as culture and climate. Instructional strategies include implementing coaching cycles to give teachers classroom feedback, and utilizing teacher leaders and coaches to support PLCs, with a focus on instructional delivery. Culture and climate interventions include developing student ability to collaborate with others successfully by teacher instructional practices rooted in the SEL framework, and utilizing the PBIS team and data to drive interventions with students and teachers to determine differentiated cycles of support. To support the work of the SIP, McGary has a principal, assistant principal, two mentor teachers who are freed up multiple periods per day in order to coach (one ELA; one math), a SEL interventionist, a social worker, and a counselor.

The school's systems are strongest for maintaining a stable school culture and climate. Students earn points through the PBIS program, and the school administration and PBIS team maintain a system for monitoring and responding to school climate and culture data, specifically PBIS and discipline data. Data is reviewed regularly. Additionally, the school has a range of opportunities for teacher leadership. Most teachers participate on one committee/team; each of which focuses on a different topic, including attendance, RTI, PBIS, technology, events, and the PLC leadership team.

McGary Middle School is in the process of developing systems to strengthen academic instruction – specifically, utilizing coaching cycles to increase the quality of instruction. Each staff member is assigned to an instructional leader who conducts walkthroughs in all teachers' classrooms. After visits, teachers usually receive feedback in the form of an email or a coaching conversation. Coaches provide feedback in alignment with the EVSC Vision for Teaching and Learning, as well as the school's instructional focus. Teachers express appreciation for the regular feedback, stating that it feels positive and constructive, and creates opportunities for them to seek out instructional support from their coach. Staff members describe the instructional vision as student-centered learning with rigor; interpretations of this vision varied across focus groups and classroom observations.

Domain 2: Quality Instructional Environment

How does the school facilitate a collaborative professional teaching culture focused on providing rigorous instruction, improving teacher practice, and adapting to student needs? How is teaching supported to drive student learning?

School administrators share concerns that they see inconsistent implementation of strategies that would yield instructional rigor, and that much of classroom instruction shows evidence of tasks at the recall/retrieval level. Evidence from classroom observations reveal students completing low-level thinking tasks, below grade-level tasks, and minimal scaffolding of skills. Students express that they “wish teachers would give them more work so they could learn more.” Instructional leaders are implementing coaching cycles to address some of these instructional gaps, and this work is in a nascent stage. Data-driven instruction is evident in pockets – primarily in the math department. Some math teachers share that they work with students to set goals and measure their own growth. Additionally, math classrooms recently started to utilize ALEKS twice weekly to support students in their personalized areas of need. Students with more severe academic gaps receive additional academic support in math or English language arts with an intervention teacher.

McGary teachers meet multiple times per week in professional learning communities. Coaches and administrators regularly join PLCs to help trouble-shoot PLC issues, answer questions, and thought-partner. Observations of this time indicate that it is largely used for strategy-sharing and not yet a time used to consistently analyze data or student work to drive instructional improvement. SIP strategy connections are less explicit. All PLCs have a leader who participates in the PLC leadership team, which is led by the assistant principal. This team connects instructional staff and school administration, meeting monthly to build teacher leadership and determine school needs. This PLC leadership team also uses walkthrough data and lesson plan review to determine the school’s professional development needs, which is then presented in faculty meetings or brought to individual PLCs. The most recent focal areas of professional development include scaffolding, grouping, technology, and rigor.

Domain 3: Conditions for Excellence

How does the school foster a positive culture among all stakeholders that promotes the shared responsibility and continuous support necessary for all students to achieve success?

Strong adult-adult and adult-student relationships are the foundation of a stabilized culture and climate at McGary. Teachers appreciate the feeling of family amongst staff members in the building, regardless of official role or title. In focus groups, teachers also discuss the importance of making connections with students, highlighting that building relationships with students is the number one priority for all staff at McGary Middle School. Administrators note that their primary hiring criteria is readiness and willingness to care for and build relationships with McGary’s students. After several years of combatting high teacher-turnover rates, this year McGary saw a stabilization in returning staff with only one vacancy to fill over the summer. Teachers attribute this to the cohesion of the school staff as well as the openness and support of administration. Teachers have open lines of communication to and from administrators, and praise the weekly newsletter from the school principal as well as administration’s all-around openness and responsiveness, via email, text message, and in-person. It is not clear that these strong adult and adult-student relationships are leveraged to hold all students to high academic expectations. Often, adults at McGary attribute significant outside of school challenges that their students face as the reason that students are not able to have academic success.

Overall, classrooms are safe, with little evidence of behavior disrupting learning. Teachers commend the support of the SEL interventionist, social worker, counselor, and school administration in ensuring a stable school climate. Students and staff members utilize the PBIS system on a daily basis, and students express excitement about the opportunity to get points and use them to purchase items at the store or go on field trips. The school has several after-school clubs, activities, and sports teams available for students to participate in, as well as an evening program for families. Teachers maintain communication with parents via phone and email.

Domain 4: Strategic Resource Allocation

How does the school strategically allocate its available resources (ex: talent, funds, time, materials, and partnerships) to maximize learning for all students?

In years past and this year, McGary has allocated resources to stabilize the school culture and climate. Systems exist to track behavior data and reward students who behave positively, and support staff are able to respond to student needs. As for instructional supports, all teachers meet in PLCs to work collaboratively on instruction and discuss student needs. Additionally, the PLC leadership team meets monthly to look at data and respond with next steps for instruction. The building is staffed with two mentor teachers who also do some of the work of coaching (one is an ELA teacher, one is a math teacher), as well as an assistant principal and a principal who conduct regular classroom walkthroughs and provide feedback to teachers via email or coaching conversation. At McGary, the principal focuses primarily on culture and climate while the assistant principal leads implementation of academic strategy. McGary receives significant weekly support from a Transformation Zone strategist who helps the mentor teachers with coaching.

Students who struggle behaviorally and academically are supported through specialized programs at McGary. Twilight is a program at McGary that serves as an alternative for suspension; students attend school in the evening and receive counseling services and make up work missed during the school day. New this year, the school designates one teacher to solely teach sections of academic intervention. Students are identified by the RTI team, using a combination of NWEA data and anecdotal classroom data. Students are assigned to the intervention teacher for a six-week cycle, during which they are expected to meet three goals, one every two weeks. This teacher supports students with ALEKS, Rewards, and Achieve3000. A stated stumbling block is that the teacher may support multiple groups of students on different programs simultaneously. When there are insufficient substitute teachers available, this teacher must serve as the substitute and students are not pulled from classrooms to receive the intervention supports.

Initial Recommendations

- **Continue to strengthen classroom instruction by providing ever more effective feedback and support to teachers.** There is a continued need to strengthen instruction at McGary Middle School, and the instructional coaching model that was launched this school year can continue to be leveraged and developed in order to meet that need. Teachers appreciate and are responsive to the regular feedback they receive. Coaches and administrators should continue to schedule and conduct regular classroom visits, as well as provide feedback through coaching conversations and feedback emails. There is a simultaneous need to ensure that the feedback is high leverage; continued norming among the leadership team is important.
- **Consider celebrating student and teacher actions leading to student achievement.** Currently, there is a cohesive and supportive staff culture at McGary Middle School. This strong culture prioritizes students' well-being and good behavior choices. The same level of prioritization/focus can be placed on students' academic growth and academic achievement. Consider leveraging the supportive adult culture to recognize and promote actions taken by instructional staff that directly and positively impact students' academic success. Administrator-teacher communication channels can be leveraged as an avenue to highlight these actions, including the principal's weekly newsletter, PLCs, and regular faculty meetings and committee meetings.