



School's Transforming Learning Nomination

Dowell Middle School
McKinney, TX
Principal - Holly Rogers

Overview and Background

In order to understand why Dowell Middle School is a school that is Transforming Learning, you have to know what makes Dowell special. Dowell Middle School in McKinney, Texas consists of over 90 staff members who serve almost 1,200 students in grades 6-8. Of our 1200 students, approximately 6% are English Language Learners, 21% are economically disadvantaged, and 25% are at-risk. Over eighty percent of our professional staff has six or more years of experience, and many of our teachers have followed our principal to Dowell from the elementary level to be a part of our great success.

This year Dowell has embraced the district initiative of "Living Kind." Teachers and students have taken on the initiative in different ways such as taking "kindness pledges," teaching kindness lessons and activities, decorating the campus with motivational slogans, having staff dress-up days in our kindness shirts, and sending motivational postcards to EVERY student. Our students have done a great job with the pledge to be kind and have even gone above and beyond by doing generous acts of charity and kindness at school and within the community to earn ARKS (or Acts of Random Kindness). One of the amazing things our student council did this year was coordinate a "thank you" day for our custodial and cafeteria staff. Each classroom created thank you banners, donated money for gifts, and held an all-school celebration through the hallways for our custodians and cafeteria staff.

At Dowell, we also love to reach out to our local community members, who are always supportive. During our "What it Means to be a Gentleman" lesson in choir, we had MISD board members, dads, and grandfathers from the community come in and help our young men learn to tie their ties for choir performances and learn what it means to be a gentlemen! As another example, our band students and cheer squad recently went to help out at a local elementary school pep rally to spread a little of our Dowell Pride. All of the aforementioned have created a campus culture and family spirit at Dowell that has allowed us to transform teaching and learning on our campus and even earn a recent level 2 certification for Marzano's High Reliability Schools.

Focus, Work, and Results - Article V: Organizational Transformation

Dowell started six years ago with low-level data meetings that were held within each content and grade level team and only involved the content-specific assistant principal. During these data meetings, scores and subpopulations were the only items that were examined and on a precursory level at best. Through these early data meetings, we began to see a need and desire arise for two main things - a campus leadership/servant team and Schlechty design training to help our teachers learn to design engaging lessons centered around our "who." Our campus leadership/servant team was created consisting of department heads, counselors, administrators, SPED/ELL/RtI/504 coordinators, Instructional Coaches, and the Media Resource Specialist. The majority of the members from this group (counselors, ICs, MRS, administrators, and all coordinators) now attend quarterly data meetings for all content/grade level teams. During these data meetings, teachers identify students who are struggling, and the team discusses and determines a plan to help these students be successful. Over the last six years, these data meetings have evolved into a much more fruitful process - not only are individual students examined, but the individual standards are now analyzed and cross-referenced with teacher success rate. This allows teams to figure out what concepts the students are struggling with and which teachers may have a better approach at teaching that particular concept. At Dowell "all means all," and if the data shows that a teacher has a great way of reaching students for a particular concept, then that teacher shares his/her techniques so that ALL students benefit from that knowledge.

It was during these early data meetings that our 6th grade science team began to question how to make learning more engaging and wanted training on how to design for their students. Thus, our then Assistant Principal (Holly Rogers) made sure to get this team the Schlechty design training they needed. It soon became clear that all of the teachers on campus would benefit from this training and would need extra time in order to effectively use Schlechty's principles. Mrs. Rogers came up with our Extended Design Days where every campus team has four hours to meet in the Design Center (subs were hired to cover the classes) with the MRS, IC, AP, and ELL coordinator. During these sessions, teachers receive a small portion of Schlechty training, and then design engaging lessons focusing on the design qualities centered around their "who." We are now in our fourth year of Extended Design Days, and teachers get to design once a quarter to create engaging lessons and activities.

Through our design sessions, we saw the need emerge for job-embedded PD that ranged from student-led interactions to help teachers understand current student interests, to technology PD for various software programs, to training for various educational activities such as Tabor, Kagan, and ELL strategies. We also had some incredible innovations and ideas occur as a direct result of our data and design sessions such as learning walks for teachers to observe other classes, teacher swap or flexible grouping, the creation of our Essential 5 (the 5 standards that our teachers promise that students WILL learn), the "all means all" mantra and help for our ELL learners/families, tracking of Student Learning Objectives by teachers and students, and the creation of Pride Time. During Pride Time, we are able to provide intense intervention for students who are struggling with specific standards for thirty minutes twice a week. Students who exhibit mastery of these standards are pulled to participate in extension activities, MakerSpace, physical education activities, counselor lessons, or elective course lessons.

As a result of these transformations, our students have reaped the benefits through more amazing authentic and relevant activities, better small group collaborative instruction, and hands-on learning. We know that in order to continue to transform learning, we need to have goals and plans for future transformation, as well. This year some of our teachers have incorporated student feedback on "teacher report cards" to gain a deeper understanding of how they can change their instruction to better meet students' needs. Several teachers are beginning to follow suit as they hear the benefits of this process. In the future we also hope to become a model PLC campus and to add even more student choice and voice at Dowell. For instance, next year we want to add another day for Pride Time so that students can get a choice of various activities they may want to participate in or learn more about. Each teacher would be responsible for hosting a group of students who are interested in a particular topic such as a 3D printing class, a yoga class, or even a creative writing class. We also want to create a student panel that meets periodically with our staff so we can learn more about our students' interests, thoughts, and wants. These are just a few of our goals that we hope to accomplish in the future, and as we implement these changes, we are sure to find new areas for improvement. It is through this growth mindset, our campus culture, and the constant desire to improve and enhance learning that we can safely say that Dowell Middle School is a school that is transforming learning.

Dowell Middle School - McKinney ISD

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Dr. Rick McDaniel - Superintendent, PI Cohort 1

Nominator: Holly Rogers, PI Cohort 8

Superintendent Signature and Endorsement:

Signature:  Date: 2-20-2019

Dr. Rick McDaniel

Superintendent McKinney Independent School District