

## McGown Elementary: Transforming Learning One Student Leader at a Time

### Overview and Background

McGown Elementary is one of our newest elementary campuses in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD. Opening a new campus is quite the undertaking, and I was grateful to be able to collaborate with other members of PI 11 during the planning stages of developing our new school. With members of our inaugural administrative team, we drafted our Top Ten Core Beliefs that we shared with every applicant we interviewed to join McGown. Our like-minded staff came together to collaborate on what we valued most and wanted to prioritize in building the culture of our brand new school. During the N2Learning annual conference that May, my thinking was not only solidified, but I was on fire. I could not wait to bring back the vision of 212° that I learned from Gary Kinner's Schools' Transforming Learning presentation about Cypress Woods High School. McGown Elementary was going to be the first 212° elementary school in Cy-Fair ISD! When the staff met that first August, we all agreed that teaching kiddos was much more than just the TEKS, much more than just assessment and accountability, it was about developing people, and our mission statement was born:

*From the center of the Earth to the top of the sky, our McGown Owls are inspired, equipped, and empowered by their belief in their potential to **LEAD** our world in changing the future.*

As a 212° school, our students would have the growth mindset necessary to be able to LEAD our world in changing the future. So, our challenge was set, how would we create an environment where students explored real-world experiences, where students were the ones leading our campus initiatives, and where our kids were in charge of their own story?

### Focus Areas

Article II.c: The New Learning Standards- Learning standards should embrace development of the whole person to build students' capacity to shape their own destiny as individuals and as contributing members of society.

We believe that developing student leaders will provide them with the capacity needed to not just be a contributing member of society, but to help shape it. Developing our student leaders opens doors to limitless opportunities.

Article V.h: Organizational Transformation- Students are in charge of determining where their attention, effort, and commitment go.

We believe in providing a multitude of opportunities for students to serve their learning community, where they not only positively contribute to their own learning journey, but also impact others.

### Work

The inaugural teachers and staff at McGown Elementary established committees devoted to providing additional resources and attention to building the culture of our new school. Two of these: (1) *Student Showcase* (highlighting student achievements) and (2) *Student Leadership* (providing opportunities for student voice and avenues for student leadership) became focal points in our work.

The Student Showcase committee developed systems to ensure student work was published in a variety of ways, such as through digital portfolios, QR codes with author explanations on wall displays, display cases in our hallways, and parent newsletters. They also established 212° Tuesday, a time each week where the administrative team would stop whatever they were doing to head to the library and receive students from all grade levels to celebrate work samples, projects, or other evidence of a 212° growth mindset. Ensuring the fine arts were emphasized as well, our students participated in a 212° Spring showcase where students displayed prized artwork and were given the platform to perform self-selected musical numbers, vocally or instrumentally. Our most celebrated community event involves showcasing our rich diversity at McGown, where students and families come together to learn about the many cultures and traditions of our unique student population. The Beauty of McGown allows students to showcase their native dress, foods, music, dances, and traditions. This annual tradition has fast become a favorite of our entire neighborhood community.

Concurrently, the Student Leadership committee brainstormed all of the ways students could lead our campus. Beginning with processes and procedures for our new school, fourth and fifth graders began creating videos to teach our younger students how to safely use the playground equipment, how to navigate the cafeteria line, and even how to exit the building in an emergency drill. There is even a student-led video describing the Buddy Bench on the playground to ensure all students know where they can go to find a friend. We had so many students interested in student council that we have a Student Parliament and a Jr. Parliament, made up of younger students. When we are busy collecting food items for our adopted partner school or finding ways to spread holiday joy, our parliament leaders communicate expectations to each homeroom. The officers are always on hand to greet school board members or school district leadership visiting our school. Stemming from a need identified by the PBIS committee to support our two-story school, Safety Patrol was born. Not only do teachers pass out our PBIS currency, but safety patrol leaders love handing out Hoot Loot, too.

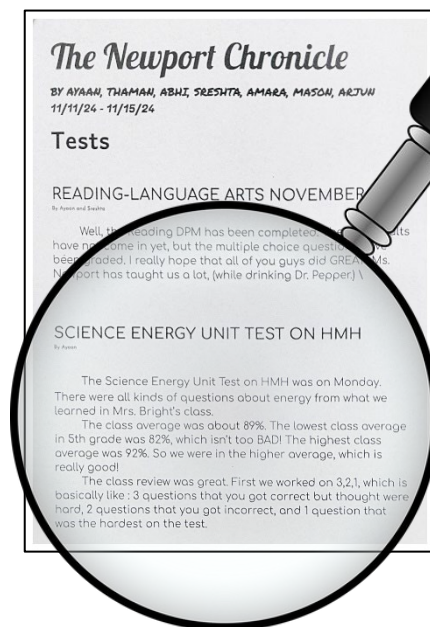
Heading into our second year, students began asking to establish additional ways to lead, and a student newspaper, *The Spoiler Alert*, was established. Another group of students initiated campus wide clean-up and began researching recycling efforts. Student videos were created for the Pledge of Allegiance, our PBIS WISE matrix, and our 212° good morning chant for student-led morning announcements. This year, we have added library helpers, as well as Nest Navigators, student mentors who greet each new student enrolling in our ever-growing campus, ensuring a successful transition to their new school.

## Results

Our administrative team has embraced the Visioning Document and hope that we can best lead our student leaders by modeling our own growth mindset and continuous life-long learning. Through this process, we are committed to sending teacher leaders to N2Learning Teacher Leadership Institute to keep the fire alive. Many of our teachers have also joined us in a year-long McGown Leadership Academy, which allows them opportunities to find new ways to develop our student leaders and continue our work, while strengthening their own leadership skills.

We are so proud of our McGown Owls! By focusing on effort and continuous growth, they are realizing the unlimited possibilities described in our mission statement. Students regularly set goals for themselves with a 212° growth mindset at the heart of their efforts and can often be heard whispering to each other about 212° effort. The students even prioritize the importance of their progress and the reflective progress. One student described it best in last month's newspaper in an article about the science energy unit test.

Feeling empowered and stretching their influence beyond the schoolhouse gates, a group of McGown owls, joined by former Owls who have taken flight in middle school, formed a "club" to clean up the community. They called themselves the Litter Ladies, and they set out to pick up trash throughout the entire neighborhood. Their reach made such an impact that they were recognized in a ceremony by the Mayor of Houston. This is just one example of the lasting impact we hope that our leadership efforts make on our Owls. The McGown Owls are in charge of their story and are making sure the very best story is told.



We invite you to join us on 212° Day, 02/12, where our Owls will be celebrating effort by continuing to dedicate energy in serving others. Our owls are now ready to fly and will be taking the lead alongside our staff as we plan out this year's 212 event. Our Owls are living our mission and *...are inspired, equipped, and empowered by their belief in their potential to LEAD our world in changing the future.*

