



# McKinney High School

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*"Rich in Legacy...Focused on the Future"*

Schools Transforming Learning Application

McKinney High School  
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McKinney High School Application for Consideration:  
2023 School of Transformation

***Overview and Background***

Graduating its first class in 1889, McKinney High School is the original of three public high schools in McKinney, Texas, and serves a diverse and ever-changing student population of approximately 3,000 students in grades 9-12. Our student body is made up of the following ethnicities: 39% White, 33% Hispanic, 18% African American, and 5% Asian. As home to our district's newcomer center, we serve a student population who speaks over forty different languages.

Our mission is to provide engaging learning experiences so students can become effective communicators, quality contributors, and socially responsible citizens. This is evident in the plethora of clubs and organizations offered because we want every student to feel connected to the MHS community. Students have their pick of over 40 clubs, including everything from Girls in STEM to spikeball to the Muslim Youth Association. We also offer over 20 CTE programs, including cosmetology; aviation; and a nationally award-winning broadcast journalism program.

Our commitment to excellence has been recognized across several areas, including our counseling staff who was honored with the CREST award for the third year in a row, our boys' basketball team who won state last year, and not one but two QuestBridge scholarship winners receiving a full ride to Brown University and Stanford University.

Continuing this tradition of excellence, our instructional coaches in partnership with campus leadership have taken training received at the 2021-2022 N2 Learning Teacher Leadership Institute and created a data room, fondly referred to as the DENN for "decisions and expectations based on student needs and numbers." In this space, we work to utilize data to determine and meet individual student's needs; drive professional development; and transform our organization to reflect this year's campus-wide mission: to build a culture of joy and excellence.

***Focus Areas***

***Article IV: Accountability for Learning***

In N2's Visioning Document, it mentions that "assessment results and other examples of work products and performances of students would be used...for understanding where students are and what they need." With this in mind, we visited a neighboring high school to see the work that stemmed from their data room. Our ICs and campus leadership took this idea of a data room and ran with it, creating the McKinney High School DENN. We felt rebranding it from a data room would help our teachers and staff see that while data is a useful tool for determining student needs, it is not the only tool. Our goals were two-fold: to share information across the campus about students' individual needs and stories and to create data-driven professional development that would help us collaborate and meet those needs. Our first step was to interview every student who met our criteria for admittance into the DENN, and we enlisted them in a short-term goal project related to either their grades or attendance. Teachers were selected by the student as their "DENN mentor" to check in on their progress for their short-term goal. This aligns with the Visioning Document that says, "End results are not the only results that matter, for some results are set as goals that, if achieved first, would enhance the end result." Over 40 students met their goal and were awarded not just with higher grades and better attendance, but a shaved ice truck treat donated by members of the community. This was an incredible way to end the 21-22 school year.

Over the course of the year, the more we explored trends among our students' various feedback and data, the more we kept coming back to a common factor: literacy. Our students in the DENN almost without exception were also struggling to read on grade-level. We created a professional development for the whole campus to introduce Lexile levels and various ways to scaffold reading tasks for our learners. This became a goal for the 2022-23 school year: literacy support across all content with a special focus on our language learners. Over the course of Academy Week and several sessions throughout this year, we have helped teachers in all content areas locate their language learners, understand their

students' reading levels, and incorporate opportunities for reading, writing, and speaking. The response from teachers has been universally positive as they encourage students to read, write, and speak more and require them to listen to lectures and direct teach less.

### *Article III: Assessments for Learning*

As the Visioning Document states in Article III, "Assessments should be used primarily for obtaining student feedback and informing the teacher about the level of student conceptual understanding or skill development." At the end of the first quarter this school year, our work in the DENN pointed towards report card grades, specifically that our students were failing courses at higher rates than last year. We brought 17 PLCs into the DENN to look at the data and discuss grading practices, as well as their inferences for this trend in grades. What emerged was a glaring need for common training around our campus expectation: we grade for mastery of learning. This became a professional development session with our teacher leaders across the campus and then the campus as a whole. We presented research and ideas for mastery grading, including the importance of giving students multiple opportunities to practice before receiving a grade and the need for individualized feedback from teachers. Just as we saw in our sessions the year before, teachers jumped into the work with open minds and fresh ideas. Teachers have overhauled curriculums to incorporate more practice attempts and feedback opportunities. Others have restructured their assessment practices to meet their students' needs. This work is transforming learning across our campus and reframing the focus to student growth rather than just grades. We have been asked to continue this work in district training as well.

### *Article V: Organizational Transformation: A Culture of Joy and Excellence*

According to the Visioning Document, "Excellence emanates from a shared commitment to values and standards, high levels of engagement, and strong leadership at levels functioning within an accountability system that inspires." With this in mind, we wanted to continue our work in the DENN and send our teacher leaders and instructional coaches to the PLC at Work Conference. Here we began the work of organizational transformation around our campus goal for the year: creating a culture of joy and excellence. Teacher leaders in multiple content areas brought back systems and structures for planning, assessments, and collaboration that they were able to immediately implement. Getting on the same page with our PLC process and expectations helped us influence the efficacy of collaborative teams across the campus. Because "[t]he teacher's most important role is to be a designer of engaging experiences for students," we also brought back our "design sessions," investing in opportunities for teachers on the same team or in the same department to meet for half days to design engaging lessons and assessments, utilizing the PLC process as well as our new understanding of mastery learning.

### **Conclusion**

The DENN has driven work in the areas explored above: student mentorship, language learner support, mastery grading, PLC processes, and curriculum and assessment design. As a result of these campus-wide efforts, we have received an A rating from the state for the first time since the change in accountability measures in 2018 and were awarded distinctions for Math, English/Reading, and Postsecondary Readiness. Our hope is to continue pursuing joy and excellence with a focus on transforming learning at McKinney High School.