

Nomination- Schools Transforming Learning

Ouida Baley Middle School
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[Ouida Baley Video Link](#)



Cultivating Student Ownership: A Transformational Journey at Ouida Baley Middle School

Overview and Background

Ouida Baley Middle School, known affectionately as #OuidaBest, has always been committed to providing meaningful and innovative learning experiences to all students. Our mission, in alignment with our district, is to empower students to shape the future. Our vision is achieving excellence by providing student-centered education in a positive and safe environment based on the foundation of our learner profile. At the core of all this, our faculty and staff work each day on capturing our kids' hearts to build a culture of caring relationships. Ouida Baley Middle School is home to almost 1,040 students in 6th-8th grades. We serve a student body made up of the following ethnicities: 41% White, 39% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 6% Other (Asian, Pacific Islander, and 2 or more races). Our Emergent Bilingual population is 22% of our campus with 15 languages spoken.

Ouida Baley Middle School is the namesake of a pillar in our community. Mrs. Ouida Baley was a Royse City ISD Educator who was also a graduate of RCHS in 1967. Her ultimate goal was always for students to find their love for learning and the path in life that brought them success. While we were striving to continue her work in how we create a high level of student engagement and experiences for our Baley students, we determined that there was some work to be done in the area of students losing their drive and connection to their own learning post Covid.

The past few years we have observed our students not being as involved as usual with their learning and putting effort into their work. We had seen a decline of student leadership and initiative. They have voiced to us that they don't see the why of school. And it has been hard to reason with them since the societal norms of the workforce have changed as well. They see so many others making it as an "influencer on social media" or the overly advertised "affiliates" that make commissions on simple hyper links to social media accounts. Some of their parents are working remotely, and the perception is "mom/dad is at home why can't I be". We had seen a decrease in their attendance at school as well. We knew it was time to work on transforming and implementing a plan to adapt our teaching and instruction for our students' needs.

Focus Areas: Article II: The New Learning Standards and Article V: Organizational Transformation

Our campus-wide focus for the 2023-2024 school is to "Explore the Possibilities". We decided this initiative would join together the specific areas we identified in the visioning document. After reflecting in the document, we keyed in on a few supporting premises of these two articles. Ultimately, we wanted to use the framework of our state standards to build and design engaging lessons that would equip our students to find their passion again for learning. And we knew we had to do this by making some school wide transformations in how we empowered our students to take ownership of their learning experiences.

Work:

Thus began our journey of transformation. Imagine a future where students not only excel academically but also possess the skills and mindset to navigate life's challenges. Our approach goes beyond the conventional, focusing on building the capacity of each student to become architects of their own success, both as individuals and as valuable contributors to society. After much collaboration, we decided we needed to focus on creating an environment that immersed students in going outside our classroom walls and vice versa bringing the outside community in to help us show students how the value of education is crucial to many of the jobs that are out there. We began by sending a student career interest survey out to our students to identify the major areas our students were eager to learn about or see in action. Once we identified those areas, we then created a list of local resources we could reach out to and the ones that might take some creativity to reach out to. How fortunate are we as a school district to have a plethora of individuals that are essential to the running of a school. We tapped into our transportation mechanics for those students that were interested in learning about mechanics/machinery/ repair. While that list goes on and on, a few other examples were us pairing student groups with our heating and air conditioning technicians, our electricians, food service workers, our own School Resource Officer from our local police department, and our nurses. We continue to connect our students with fields of interest out in the community. Our students have visited with local business owners all the way to a petroleum engineer. Students interviewed them, asked them their most pressing questions, and even saw them in action. Where it has been appropriate, our students have been able to be hands on as well. We recreated our school wide vision statement with student input. "As Baley Bulldogs, we keep it REAL...I **R**espect relationships, **E**ngage in my learning, and **A**pply my skills for Lifelong Success."

Results

As we unravel the layers of this transformative work, exploring how learning standards can be the catalyst for personal growth, self-discovery, and societal impact, we noticed the results have been beyond what we could have expected. Our students now see the connection and the importance of their education within their future success. Each individual adult has stressed to them how they apply their academic learning in their career, and students are taking more ownership of their work and efforts at school. The success extends beyond academic metrics, as students are now taking the initiative to explore their academic and career pathways, reaching out to counselors for guidance. Our failure rates on grading reports from student work have significantly decreased. Our attendance data is above the percentages from last year. But more importantly, student empowerment has increased and we couldn't be more proud of them. In a world evolving at an unprecedented pace, where change is the only constant, our commitment is to continue fostering engaging lessons that empower our students to shape their own destiny. Our work will continue with building our resources of partnerships with individuals in the workforce to pair with students, as well as continue to monitor our students as they continue on to high school and keep track of paths to see if our transformative work opened doors for their future.