

McCarthy-Towne School
SCHOOL COUNCIL

Report for 2007–2008
&
School Improvement Plan for 2008–2009

I. Background and Rationale

A. School Council Responsibilities

The MCT School Council provides three useful functions:

- a. It increases communication within the school community;
- b. It provides a forum for a small group of faculty, parents, and community representatives to discuss issues, thorny problems, and difficult situations;
- c. It provides oversight to certain school-wide projects.

The job of the School Council is to decide how student, faculty, and parent concerns may be handled and to recommend the appropriate group or individual to do so. It serves as a forum to identify and discuss issues and problems and refer them to the appropriate group or decision maker(s) for final determination. The faculty, PTSO Steering Committee, subcommittees, and Student Council provide the mechanisms for accomplishing whatever needs to be done.

In some Massachusetts communities the School Councils receive funds directly from the School Committee to help finance projects that will improve the learning of students in their schools. The School Council requests that the APS School Committee set aside \$5,000 for each School Council to fund special projects to help each school attain its improvement plan.

B. School Council Membership - [All are two-year terms except for principal]:

Parent Representatives:	Janet Chinitz	2006-2008
	Betsy Gitelman	2007-2008
	Carolyn Imperato	2006-2008
	Jayanthi Sampathkumaran	2003-2008
Community Representatives:	John Rowse, M.D.	2004-2008
	Pam Resor (Ex Officio)	1993-2008
Faculty Representatives:	Marcia FitzGerald	Permanent
	Robin Kynoch	1998-2008
	Sharon Ryan	2007-2008
	Susan Silberberg	2004-2008

C. School Council Meetings

The MCT School Council schedules five regular meetings during each academic year. These meetings usually occur in October, November or December, January

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or February, March or April, and May or June. Other meetings may be added if necessary.

One part of each meeting is devoted to hearing concerns from the faculty, the parents, and the Student Council. Another part is to hear how work is progressing on the School Improvement Plan. Each meeting usually focuses on one or two of the School Council's goals. A third part of each meeting is set aside for discussion of any other issues. Each part is scheduled to last approximately 30 minutes.

II. School Improvement Plan Goals for 2007-2008

Goal # 1: Focus on advancing the literacy of all students at MCT. Faculty will continue work begun during the 05-06 school year on 6 + 1 Traits of writing by:

- a. Using the newly created writing rubrics and benchmark writing samples to assess student writing;
- b. Planning writing instruction based upon these assessments;
- c. Working with colleagues to assess growth in students' writing;
- d. Making changes in the rubric and instruction as indicated by this year's work.

Goal # 2: Maintain and expand focus on the arts. Support the:

- a. Art integration program as it reflects the strengths of the specialist and the needs of the current faculty;
- b. Sloyd program by expanding its focus to include artists within the parent community and broadening the students' understanding of what is happening in today's art and architectural world.

Goal # 3: Continue to support ESL students and their families to improve their comfort and success in the McCarthy-Towne School community. We will:

- a. Evaluate the success of the International Family Handbook through interviews with family members;
- b. Continue and expand the Buddy Family program.

III. Assessment of the current year's School Council work:

A. Literacy

1. This year the McCarthy-Towne faculty continued its focus on the advancement of literacy among all students. Members of the faculty:
 - Participated in a summer R & D focusing on and preparing for the assessment work to be done during the 2007-08 school year;

- Participated in phonics and vocabulary study groups;
- Created an extensive bibliography of writing resources for teachers and students;
- Developed a set of teaching lessons and activities for each of the 6 + 1 traits;
- Viewed, discussed, and evaluated model lessons focusing on individual traits;
- Worked in grade-level teams to assess student writing and to plan remediation;
- Modified their grade-level writing rubric based upon instructional experience;
- Used the biweekly grade-level planning time to assess student writing using the student samples collect during the 2006-07 school year.

2. In an effort to inform the parent community, the members of the School Council wrote and distributed the following document:

Writing Literacy at McCarthy-Towne: Six Traits of Writing From the McCarthy-Towne School Council

One of the goals of the McCarthy-Towne school improvement plan is to focus on advancing the literacy of all students at McT. The school council wishes to share information with you about an approach the faculty is using to achieve this goal: Ruth Culham's Six Traits of Writing.

Background

Before the faculty began to implement Six Traits, they spent a year analyzing the Six Traits textbook, chapter by chapter, in grade-level meetings. Through this process, the faculty decided to use the traits in their writing curriculum; they then put together a comprehensive plan for how best to do so at McCarthy-Towne and at each grade level.

What are the Six Traits?

Six Traits is not a writing process; the traits are an additional layer to the writing curriculum. The teachers teach one trait at a time, although they address multiple traits when appropriate. The teacher can also circle back to traits as needed. Each teacher teaches the traits in the order she or he chooses. While all traits are taught at each grade level, emphasis on and expectations for each trait vary considerably from grade to grade.

These traits apply to both creative writing and to non-fiction writing. Briefly, they include:

- Ideas (content)
- Organization (structure)
- Word choice (accuracy, variety)
- Sentence fluency (sound of sentences)
- Voice (tone of the piece)
- Conventions (mechanics)

Ideas are the content of the writing. Teachers work with students on gathering ideas, selecting a topic and fine-tuning it, developing the ideas, and evaluating which ideas are important or interesting.

Organization is the structure of the writing: Does information flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Are similar ideas grouped together? Teachers use graphic organizers to help students with organization. They may introduce multiple organizers and offer the students the choice of which to use, emphasizing that no one approach is right for everyone.

Because the process of writing can differ for each student, the order in which students express their ideas may differ from the order in which these ideas appear in the final draft. When working on organization, students learn both about the process and how to plan for revision.

Word choice is about choosing the best words to express an idea. The words must be, most importantly, accurate. Students also learn that choosing a different word—perhaps a word that is new to the student—to say the same thing can make a piece of writing more vital.

Sentence fluency means how the sentences sound to the ear. Does the student vary her sentence structures? Are sentences simple or complex? Is each sentence easy to read? Does the word order enhance or detract from each sentence's intended meaning?

Voice is usually the hardest aspect of writing for students to learn. Just as a speaker has a voice with inflections and personality, so does writing. Does the writing show the author's individuality? Does it evoke an emotional response? Is it written in the right style for the audience? These are all facets of voice.

Conventions concern the mechanics of the writing, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar. In a sense, this is the easiest trait to learn. While important, conventions are de-emphasized during the writing process so they do not inhibit the writer's ability to express himself. Conventions are perhaps the most grade-level-specific trait. For example, in the early grades, students may refer to a “word wall” to know the words they are expected to spell correctly. As the students progress through the grades, the list grows; while it may be acceptable to write “I lik toys” in first or second grade, by third grade, students are expected to spell “like” correctly in their finished papers. All grades use developmentally appropriate standards for grammar and punctuation.

Benefits of Six Traits

Common vocabulary. One of the strengths of Six Traits is its common vocabulary used across all grade levels. This consistency helps the students to strengthen each trait as they move from grade to grade. At the start of each school year, they are already familiar with the traits. They can then build on their knowledge without having to learn a new vocabulary for it.

Dovetailing with reading. The two central aspects of literacy are writing and reading. By applying this same vocabulary to what they read, students can learn

as much about writing from reading as they can from the act of writing. For example, as the class reads a passage, the teacher might point out a strong word choice. The students will come to notice the impact of strong word choices and strive to make better choices themselves. In one exercise used at McT, the teacher reads aloud just the opening sentence of several books. The students start to understand the importance of opening sentences. They learn both to appreciate strong writing-enhancing their reading-and to model their own writing after what they read. Reading is particularly instructive in conveying the concept of voice.

Writing at home

How can the Six Traits help you help your child? While each parent's style is different-some parents review homework nightly, some do not help their children with homework at all-if you do give feedback to your child on his writing, you can pose questions using the Six Traits vocabulary. For example: Do you think the organization works? Have you thought about your word choices? Are your ideas strong? Simply posing the questions may encourage your child to review and improve her work.

To read an article on Six Traits by Ruth Culham go to:

http://www.ascd.org/authors/ed_lead/el200610_culham.html

B. The Arts

1. The importance of the Art Integration Specialist (AIS) and the Sloyd program at McCarthy-Towne cannot be overstated. Both have been part of our school since its founding in 1971. Each year we include goals in support of these programs in our school improvement plan to ensure their continued success as part of the McCarthy-Towne School curriculum. We have met this goal in the following ways:

- Continued support of the AIS through weekly meetings;
- Expanded the Sloyd volunteer program;
- Developed architectural/contemporary art projects such as the Keith Haring-inspired graffiti wall and the Claes Oldenburg papier maché tools;
- Continued the integration of classroom curriculum in Sloyd projects: Balance & Motion/Calder stables, Ghana/masks, Paris/clay gargoyles, Lowell mills/ceramic coil weaving, Greece/clay pots with classic design motifs, Simple Machines/Calder balancing toys, Egypt/Bastet cats and amulets);
- Photographed artwork and created CDs for archival reference and student portfolios;
- Held a Sloyd family art night.

C. Support of ESL Students and their Families

1. Our focus has been on integrating new international families into our community. To help accomplish this we have done the following:

- Distributed the International Family Handbook (IFH) to families and made it available on our school website;
- Translated the IFH into Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, and Spanish;
- Surveyed parents who received the IFH about the IFH and the Buddy Family program;
- The PTSO has set up buddy families for new international families. They have done this to welcome the new families, answer questions, and provide support;
- Held the second International Evening with Merriam, which was very well attended by all members of our community. People brought food to share. Some students as well as their parents did some short performances related to their culture.

IV. School Improvement Plan Goals for 2008-2009

Goal # 1:

Focus on advancing the mathematical concepts and skills of students at MCT. Faculty will review our K - 6 mathematics curriculum to determine:

- a. The alignment of the MCT mathematics scope and sequence as compared to the Massachusetts Frameworks;
- b. The level of students' concept/skill mastery and how it is assessed;
- c. The appropriateness of our current mathematics program in achieving our goals.

Goal # 2:

Maintain and expand focus on the arts. Support the:

- a. Art integration program as it reflects the strengths of the specialist and the needs of the current faculty;
- b. Sloyd program by expanding its focus to include artists within the parent community and broadening the students' understanding of what is happening in today's art and architectural world.

Goal # 3:

Define, articulate, and communicate MCT's values as they relate to the upcoming leadership transition. We will work to:

- a. Ensure the process is inclusive;
- b. Ensure clear communication is provided to all members of the community.

V. Election of School Council members for 2008-2009

Election of new faculty and parent representatives of the McCarthy-Towne School Council for the coming school year will take place in June, before the end of the current school year.

This School Council Report and School Improvement Plan is submitted to the Acton Public Schools School Committee on June 1, 2008 by the members of the 2007-2008 McCarthy-Towne School Council.

Signatures of the 2007-2008 School Council Members:

Parent Representatives:

Janet Chinitz	2006-2008	_____
Betsy Gitelman	2007-2008	_____
Carolyn Imperato	2006-2008	_____
Jayanthi Sampathkumaran	2003-2008	_____

Community Representatives:

John Rowse	2004-2008	_____
Pam Resor	1993-2008	_____

Faculty Representatives:

Marcia FitzGerald	Permanent	_____
Robin Kynoch	1998-2008	_____
Sharon Ryan	2007-2008	_____
Susan Silberberg	2004-2008	_____