

McCoy Elementary School

McCoy Elementary School is a neighborhood school that serves 315 children in Kindergarten through fifth grade. About half of the children at McCoy are bused to the school from the northeast area of the city. The school has a growing number of students whose first language is a language other than English; McCoy has an ESL program that addresses these students' language needs.

McCoy Elementary School is a Caring Communities site. Caring Communities at McCoy serves as a network of nearly 20 private and public organizations that provide social and health services provided for the purpose of helping children be successful socially, emotionally, and academically. Caring Communities refers families to appropriate agencies in the community as well as provides some of these services at the school site. According to the school's Caring Communities brochure, services include a summer youth program, computer literacy education, Literacy power lunch, KCMO Adopt-a-Street program, youth sports, a before and after school program, the after school academy, and Educare.

A KCMSD Literacy Demonstration Site, McCoy Elementary School is in its fourth year of intensive literacy focus. Educators from Kansas City, throughout the state of Missouri, and around the country visit McCoy to learn about how balanced literacy can be implemented and managed. Although the school has not had a formal relationship with the program for several years, McCoy's schoolwide management plan continues to be based on the Comer School Development program.

McCoy was the recipient of a Federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grant. This grant funding provided additional assistance for the school from the

Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. The focus of this work resulted in the implementation of the Principles of Learning.

McCoy Elementary School participates in the C.H.A.N.C.E. program, a joint effort with the Jackson County Family Court. Through this program, truancy court is held at the school each week. Parents and students who have been referred to the program because of attendance problems are required to attend the weekly meetings with a family court judge to develop plans to improve students' attendance, academic performance, and behavior and to discuss the progress of the students. Parents and students in the program are also required to participate in a family support group that meets each week at the school.

On the day of the site visit, the principal was facilitating a book exchange. Because school staff members believe that it is important for children to have books of their own to read, they have begun a weekly book exchange. Each week, children take books of their own that they have read to contribute to the book exchange collection; for each book a child contributes, he may take a book from the collection. Children seemed eager to exchange their books, and they seemed excited about the books that they chose.

During the 2000-2001 school year, McCoy Elementary was named one of 15 Gold Star Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Gold Star designation is for schools considered outstanding by DESE.

Teaching and Learning

The McCoy principal and teachers at the school noted that the newly revised Core Curriculum is useful because it is more specific and more hands on. Having specified objectives for each quarter helps them to "be smart about what we do." Teachers at McCoy are also working to implement the New Standards primary literacy standards that are more rigorous and

challenging, and at the same time, are developmentally appropriate. The inclusion of student work samples in the standards document help to raise teacher expectations as well as understanding about the meaning of the standards.

The school has an intensive focus on balanced literacy as well as the Institute for Learning Principles of Learning. In classrooms at McCoy, four of the Principles have been implemented. They include acceptable talk, organizing for effort, clear expectations, and academic rigor in a thinking curriculum. This year the school is working on two additional principles, self-management of learning and fair and credible evaluations.

McCoy also is working on improving teaching and student learning in mathematics. They adopted TERC mathematics, Investigations in Numbers, Data, and Space, three years ago because it is inquiry-based and focused on problem-solving.

The Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC) has developed computer software that is aligned with the KCMSD Core Curriculum, the Show Me Standards, the New Standards, the TERC mathematics program, and the balanced literacy program. This software is available in all classrooms at the school. In addition to learning activities, the software is capable of generating individual homework assignments.

In all classrooms at McCoy School, teachers and children were observed in lessons that actively engaged children in thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and validation of learning.

Children in a third grade were finishing breakfast, reading, and completing their “morning work” as the observation began. The teacher was doing a running record with one student. As she finished the running record, she asked the class to “take a break from reading” to check the morning work. The morning work was finding and correcting grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors in two sentences that had been written on an overhead

transparency. Children took turns making corrections on the overhead and explaining why the corrections were necessary. When all the corrections had been made, the teacher asked the children, "Why do we do morning work?" Students explained that it helped them with their writing, and then one asked, "Is it like word study?" The teacher asked, "What do you mean?" The child explained, "You're teaching us the same thing!"

In another third grade classroom, the children were finishing the independent reading portion of Readers Workshop. The teacher had just done a running record with a student and recorded his new reading level on a chart. The children recorded their reading in their reading logs and went to the carpet for a mini-lesson about doing book talks. They discussed what they could talk about in a book talk, comparing book talks about fiction and non-fiction books. Then in pairs, they did book talks about one of the books they had been reading during independent reading.

A fifth grade class had been studying electricity and circuits. The teacher led a review of the previous day's work making circuits with batteries, light bulbs, and wires. He gave students paper and challenged them to draw circuits with batteries, light bulbs, and only one wire. Students talked together as they worked, comparing their drawings and discussing what they knew about circuits. After they had drawn their hypotheses (the teacher referred to the drawings as hypotheses), the teacher distributed batteries, light bulbs, and wires to test them. As they worked, the teacher circulated around the room, working with individual children. One child asked, "How do you know the light bulbs aren't burned out?" The class discussed the question and decided that working with a partner would allow them to test their ideas with more than one set of equipment.

Fourth graders were observed during a math lesson. They had made designs with pattern blocks and recorded them on pattern block paper. They were writing descriptions of their designs—the shapes they had used, the colors, what the designs looked like, whether they were symmetrical, and if so, whether the symmetry was rotational or mirror.

In a first grade classroom, children were also engaged in a math lesson. There, the teacher showed the children a shape made of Lock Blocks and asked the children to reproduce the shape. As the teacher held up the shape for the children to see, she asked the children to think about how many blocks they would need to make the shape. After children had made the shape, the teacher asked the children to explain what they had done. Each time, several different strategies were explained. The last shape the teacher showed was three-dimensional, which was difficult for some of the children to reproduce. The teacher asked a child who had been successful to show the other children how she had made it.

Every classroom in the school has baskets of books sorted by level, genre, topic, and author. Student work from every curriculum area is displayed in classrooms, along with a description of the expectations for the work and the rubric or scoring guide that was used to judge it. All work displayed was individual and creative; there were no “one right answer” worksheets displayed in any classroom. Student work was displayed throughout the hallways of the school. There were also charts that recorded student discussion and work in various curriculum areas. All classrooms had word walls that included science, social studies, and mathematics vocabulary. In most classrooms, at some time during the observations, teachers and students referred to the charts or the word walls.

In every classroom, when students were asked, they could describe what they were doing and what they were supposed to learn from it. Many of the children described their work in

terms of personal goals or the criteria charts and rubrics posted in the classrooms. It was also clear from the discourse observed in the classrooms that students have internalized the expectations and criteria for their work and their learning.

Assessment

Student learning is assessed in many different ways at McCoy. Besides the SAT9 and the MAP, the school uses the KEY LINKS mathematics assessment and portfolios generated by the CCC program. Upper grade students also use Accelerated Reader which generates reports about their reading comprehension. At the classroom level, there are teacher-generated assessments that are part of instruction and teacher- and student-developed criteria charts, scoring guides, and rubrics for classroom processes and products. Student work is also assessed through peer critiques and conferences with peers and teachers.

Teachers use running records, reportedly six to eight times a year with every student. During two of the classroom observations, teachers were doing running records with children. One of the teachers noted that she does one or two each day. In one of those classrooms, a boy reminded the teacher about doing a running record with him. Each student has a portfolio that includes artifacts of reading and writing; both students and teachers select pieces to be included in the portfolios.

Teachers at McCoy have been working to help students prepare for the MAP by getting them ready to answer MAP question in three different ways. They have developed mathematics tasks that are aligned both with the TERC math series that they use and the MAP.

McCoy teachers have a wealth of information available that they analyze and use to plan for teaching and for identifying and meeting the needs of the children at the school. Assessment

is embedded in all instruction at the school, and it seemed obvious that students expect their work to be judged.

One of the assessment challenges faced by the school is how to gather good information about the learning of English language learners. The CCC software includes “Discover English,” which tracks ESL learners’ English levels.

Professional Development

At McCoy Elementary School, professional development is just a normal part of teaching; it is job-embedded. Teachers participate in workshops, study groups, peer and expert coaching, and mentoring; professional development takes place before, during, and after school, on weekends, and during summer vacation.

Teachers from McCoy have participated in TERC training in Maine and St. Louis. Besides learning about implementing the TERC mathematics program, teachers also learned about interpreting and using data as part of their teaching. They have had opportunities to visit schools in New York and work with the teachers there on balanced literacy.

This school year, McCoy teachers are participating in the KCMSD technology training. They have had several workshops and opportunities to work with Susan Radley on non-fiction genre study, sponsored by the Institute for Learning. The MAP team at the school meets with teachers about five hours a month working on developing performance events and constructed response assessments.

All teachers at the school participate in peer coaching. There is a schedule for peer coaching; all teachers have opportunities to coach and be coached on a regular basis. Study groups meet weekly. This school year they are studying and analyzing teacher-developed questions to determine where they need to raise expectations, to “ratchet up the work.” They

also read and study professional literature related to balanced literacy. At the time of the site visit, Kindergarten and first grade teachers were studying Pinnell and Fountas' Word Matters, while second through fifth grade teachers studied Snowball and Boulton's Spelling K-8:

Planning and Teaching. The principal reported that teachers also would read and study How's It Going? (Anderson), Wondrous Words (Ray), and Guiding Readers and Writers 3-8 (Pinnell and Fountas).

Achievement Gap

Improving student learning and increasing student achievement are the goals of the teaching, assessment, and professional development at McCoy. Teachers continuously analyze their own work to find ways to fine tune to better meet the needs of their students and to help them learn more and learn better.

In addition to all that is done during the regular school day, McCoy has an after-school academy that at the time of the site visit served 40 children in second, third, and fourth grades. Six teachers and the principal work at the after-school academy that meets Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday after school. Children in the after-school academy have additional learning experiences in reading and mathematics. One of the challenges facing the school is that so many of the children are bused to the school. There are no late buses, so children who are bused do not have an opportunity to participate in the program unless parents provide transportation. The principal reported seeking funding for late buses from a number of sources; at the time of the visit, none had been secured. However, a community partner is considering funding a late bus for the 2002-2003 school year.

Summary

Everyone at McCoy School seems focused on learning that is child-centered, meaningful, and authentic. Teachers communicate high expectations for student responsibility for their own learning, and at the same time, assess students continuously to plan appropriate instruction for them.

Teachers view professional development as part of teaching. It is embedded in all that they do. They analyze the effectiveness of their teaching, they identify areas they want to improve, they read and study professional literature. They are learners themselves, and they model learning for their students.

McCoy is a demonstration site, truly a model of a learning community!