



## **Minnesota Transitions Charter School**

### **MDHR Semi-Annual Report-CI #1386543**

We at Minnesota Transitions Charter School have continued our journey in better understanding how we serve our students and which areas we need to improve on, in order to genuinely reach each child. In August, I transitioned from my role as School Social Worker, which is the role I served our youth in for the last 3 years, to my current position as the Director of Equity and Diversity. Elevating our equity work to an administrative level speaks to our deep dedication to serve our students and community authentically and I am honored to share our progress in this work, thus far.

#### **Progress on Final Plan**

As mentioned above, MTCS has hired a full-time Director of Equity and Diversity. In this role, I supervise our social work team, as well as, our Family Engagement Coordinators. This allows us to consult regularly and align our practices to best support our students and families. I am on the School Board and I facilitate our Board Equity Committee which meets quarterly with ongoing work in between meetings. We surveyed our learning community to receive feedback on what equity means to our staff and I will survey our students and families, as well. The committee will then create our MTCS definition of Equity that will ground our work moving forward. Until we have crafted our personal definition with our community, we will continue to utilize the definition of equity as defined by the Minnesota Department of Education, as well as, their Equity Magnifier, to inform our lens.

#### *Academic Coaching*

We have three academic coaches in our district that are supporting our MTS Elementary school, Banaadir North/South and MTS Secondary. Our coaches meet with our teachers regularly to engage with our scope and sequence, develop lesson planning skills and build capacity in utilizing data to inform instruction. These coaches can continue conversations based on our embedded professional development around standard-based teaching practices, data and cultural lenses when assessing curriculum and building deeper connections with their students. .

#### *Professional Development*



For the school year of 2019-2020, we have adopted ½ day Fridays to embed professional development for our staff. We rotate between Trauma-Informed Practices (for which, I am the trainer), Restorative Practice, Standards-Based Teaching Practices, Teach Like a Champion and conduct data dives to improve our instruction. For Trauma-Informed Practices PD, I also apply the lens of Cultural Proficiency to the work we do. Often work around trauma misses vital cultural considerations and sometimes does not address the internal workings of individuals that can impact judgement and behavior. As a learning community, we are exploring how our own core values, beliefs and mental models inform the data we select, the assumptions we make, which drive our judgements and ultimately extend outward in our behavior. If we hope to genuinely address equity as a community, it is imperative that we begin with ourselves. As adults, we must recognize that we are all affected by systemic racism and oppression. The only way to make progress towards not perpetuating those same systems inside of our classrooms, is to reflect and dialogue about how our thinking is impacted as a result of White Supremacy and acknowledging our roles in intentionally dismantling those practices.

### *Restorative Practice*

We are making progress in our implementation of Restorative Practices, however, turnover rates can also make gaining momentum difficult. It is challenging to move onto stage 2, 3 and 4 if we are perpetually needing to begin again at square one, every year. MTS Elementary school and P.E.A.S.E. Academy are the most successful sites, thus far, in integrating circles into daily scheduling and responding to discipline issues with a fully restorative process. MTS Secondary struggles with shifting the mindset of our educators from punitive to restorative, not from an administrative level but a teacher one. Understanding a new way of holding students accountable has been very challenging, as their mental models are rooted in traditional ways of approaching classroom management. Dismantling belief systems that are rooted in power and control is something that takes much time, patience and persistence. I am confident that we will continue to make forward strides in this area and we are beginning to hire new staff that are more aligned with this vision already, which is helpful.

Furthermore, there is a team of us who are trying to create a restorative framework for responding to discipline. This plan will be finished by the end of the year but we are implementing processes of engaging in restorative conversations, circles



and conferencing presently. When an incident occurs, attempts are made to involve all student parties; teachers, if the issues stems from a ruptured teacher-student relationship; and parents, especially if it involves a re-entry from a suspension. Restorative practice is highly individualized and the repair of harm is decided upon by students and staff to best match the rupture. We are continuing our efforts in creating clearer systems and communication lines that include all necessary parties, as well as, re-examining how we genuinely make room for processes that require ample time and attention.

### *Culturally Proficient School Systems*

Additionally, last school year (2018-2019), I trained our administrative team in Culturally Proficient School Systems (CPSS). The hope was that then leaders would be ready to continue the work in their own buildings. While, the training was largely successful in shifting mindsets, building capacity and creating space for creating deeper levels of understanding of the self, no leader felt equipped to train their staff. Which in full-disclosure, they were trained in the framework, not trained as trainers of the framework. As mentioned above, I continue this work with staff during our embedded professional development, but I have begun conversations with district administrators about how we honor this work more fully, rather than solely sharing space with trauma-informed practices. We will continue these conversations and by the end of the year, we will have a plan for me to connect with all staff regularly about this work. I truly believe that by utilizing the Culturally Proficient School Systems framework, we will begin to see the actual shifts we desire.

### *Learner and Community Voice*

In the beginning of the year, we hosted our annual meeting, in which we shared our vision, mission, our strengths, areas of growth and philosophies on approaching learning and discipline with students. Our Superintendent emphasized our dedication to Trauma-Informed and Restorative responses, all with the lens of Cultural Proficiency and Equity. We communicated our plan to engage in our own professional learning to better serve our learners. We provided survey feedback opportunities and unfortunately, had limited response. This is an area of focus for me as well, in which I hope to develop trusting relationships with our families that will result in opening our lines of communication and developing feedback loops.



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At the heart of equity work is elevating and prioritizing space for youth to engage in self study. On a recent site visit to California I heard the quote, “Schools violate our humanity when they deny our identities and cultural connections.” My focus is to challenge our organization to put students at the center of all learning. More equitable outcomes will require us to involve students, families and community members in helping us understand what students want/need to learn in order to be successful, outside of state standards. Our key stakeholders will also be vital in better understanding how to create an environment that elevates all voices, honors and celebrates difference and attends to the development of our learners as whole and complete people.

One way I hope to address involving stakeholders is by creating teams of people to consult with. We have created a Student Advisory Council for MTS Secondary to meet with me and our Principal monthly to engage in dialogue on improving learning experiences, creating a more connected and compassionate learning community and planning for next year. I am meeting with each Family Engagement Coordinator to construct cultural considerations handouts for teachers and paraprofessionals to reference in regards to our Somali/East African, African American, Latinx/Hispanic and Indigenous learners. My hope is that with specific attention paid to our differences, we can elevate the vibrant assets that our differences are, lead with empathy and understanding and bridge deeper connections within our community.

Finally, we have a committee that is chaired by our Director of Food Service, who has also been a parent in our community and is a woman of color. We are a very diverse group and our task is to design a school year calendar that celebrates the cultural traditions and histories of our students throughout the year. Historically, we have only been good about honoring cultural traditions when we had a staff member who was dedicated to planning and leading an event. Our calendar will honor traditions regularly, offering ideas for embedding cultural conversations into the classroom, having information/imagery displayed in hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, on projectors and hosting events. The calendar will serve to provide structure that can be followed regardless of which impassioned staff we have.

### *Next Steps*

Our work will continue on course and will remain open to what surfaces now that our students and staff have a specific person to come to. As I continue to build positive



relationships with all members of our learning community, I am entrusted with the experiences, thoughts, curiosities and concerns that swirl among us. As I consult with our staff of color, I gain more insight as to the many layers of work we have to do. I also must continue to do my own work in walking through the journey of self study, just as I ask of our staff.

Now that I have had an opportunity to settle into this role and understand our contract with MDHR, my goal for the rest of the year is to focus on a tracking system that is more streamlined across the district. Currently, each site tracks their own data in a spreadsheet that categorizes all the necessary points of data. I am the designated reviewer of this data and as I get more familiar with how we are tracking, we can begin to be more intentional about analyzing this information with as much attention as we do academic and attendance data. I want us all to be consistent about what, how and when we track, so that I can ensure that we have accurate data to review regularly. Once I can establish a review pattern for this data, I will facilitate dialogue with leaders about what we see and how we can be proactive around themes in behavior. Once we have completed our restorative rubric for responding to ruptures in relationships, we can be more intentional in our tracking. I hope to examine the finer nuances of discipline and how we can affect positive change rather than stick with broad data that tells little of the people behind the numbers.

## Summary Data

### MTS Secondary (seat-based program)

Total Number of Students: **261**

Demographics: **96% Students of Color; 32% EL; 31% SpEd; >90% F/R; & 12% Homeless**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **2,773 reports made to Student Support**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **70 Suspensions Issued**

Reasons for Suspensions: **Physical Fight, Instigating Violence, Marijuana Use, Weapon Threat, Spraying Fire Extinguisher, Possessing Alcohol, Assault & Destruction of Property**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **40**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **30**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **Somali, African American, Native American, & Hispanic.**



### **MTS Elementary** (seat-based program)

Total Number of Students: **92**

Demographics: **88% Students of Color; 12% EL; 15% SpEd; >90% F/R; & 12% Homeless**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **131 incidences reported**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **0**

Reasons for Suspensions: **N/A**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **0**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **0**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **N/A**

### **Banaadir South** (seat-based program)

Total Number of Students: **123**

Demographics: **100% Students of Color,**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **58**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **3**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **2**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **1**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **Somali**

### **Banaadir North** (seat-based program)

Total Number of Students: **149**

Demographics: **100% Students of Color,**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **0**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **5 suspensions**

Reasons for Suspensions: **Physical fight, destruction of property & physical towards staff and students**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **5**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **0**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **Somali/East African**

Banaadir North does not have an office referral system. Any issues that arise are most often tended to within the classroom. On occasion the Dean of Students and Director will visit a classroom experiencing difficulty to help facilitate a repair and



resolution. The suspensions were the result of isolated incidents involving physical harm.

#### **P.E.A.S.E. (seat-based program)**

Total Number of Students: **37**

Demographics: **18% Students of Color; 4% EL; 25% SpEd; 39% F/R; & 0% Homeless**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **0**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **2**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **2**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **0**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **White**

P.E.A.S.E. has a true restorative process which does not include an “office referral” process. The view is that students need access to different supports to be more present in class. Supports include the Director, Chemical Dependency Counselor and a School Social Worker. When an incident arises, attention is paid to which support is needed, which the student helps to identify. This learning community regularly engages in restorative circles, mindful movement and addresses difficulty from a community approach.

#### **Virtual High School (online program)**

Total Number of Students: **471**

Demographics: **35% Students of Color; 2% EL; 22% SpEd; 40% F/R; & 5 % Homeless**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **0**

Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **0**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **0**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **0**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **N/A**

#### **Connections Academy (online program)**

Total Number of Students: **2926**

Demographics: **25% Students of Color; 1% EL; 16% SpEd; 48% F/R; 1% Homeless**

Total Number of Office Referrals: **0**



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Total Number of Suspensions/Expulsions: **0**

Number of Suspensions involving Gen Ed. Student: **0**

Number of Suspensions involving Special Ed. Student: **0**

Ethnicity of Students issued Suspensions: **N/A**

## **Conclusion**

We acknowledge that we are only beginning to get to all the things that live “under the iceberg” of equitable discipline and educational practices. However, this work has my full attention and unwavering dedication to help lead our district in doing this work daily. There is never a moment when the lens of equity isn’t a part of the conversation, examination and decision-making process. I consult with our Superintendent, Brian Erlandson, regularly, to ensure that we are always being intentional in aligning our actions with our values and beliefs. We are in constant reflection and dialogue about how we better attend to the needs of our students. By elevating the voices of those most marginalized we will have different conversations, share different perspectives and together, we will find ways to deepen our connection, understanding, and compassion. With meaningful engagement, over time, we will live closer to the equitable learning environment we hope to be.

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